Remarks to the joint ad hoc meeting of the First and Fourth Committees to address possible challenges to space security and sustainability

Mr. KIM Won-soo

Acting High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

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Ambassador Karel Jan Gustaaf Van Oosterom, Chair of the First Committee
Ambassador Brian Bowler, Chair of the Fourth Committee

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

I would to thank the previous panellists for their comprehensive analysis of the issues.

I welcome the decision to convene this joint meeting. I understand this format is very exceptional and unprecedented in UN history. I believe that it reflects a growing recognition of the need for States to address the cross-cutting aspects of security challenges in outer space and to do so in a comprehensive manner.

The Group of Governmental Experts, or GGE, that finished its work in 2013 was the first GGE held on this issue in twenty years. Given the importance of this issue, this is far too lengthy a gap.

I congratulate Mr Vasiliev and the other GGE members on their ability to produce a consensus report. As Mr Vasiliev has said, this GGE was also able to achieve a first – consensus among members on recommendations for voluntary transparency and confidence-building measures (TCBMs) in outer space.

The GGE also recognised the importance of removing silos and the need for cooperation across the United Nations. The relevant UN entities, including my office, UNODA, have followed this recommendation by working together across our respective portfolios.

Member States have also continued their discussions in various fora to find a consensual way forward. Most recently, last July, the meeting convened by the European Union ended with the common understanding that future meetings should be conducted within the framework of the United Nations. But it seems that Member States have yet to find the common ground about what should be the right modalities for such future meetings. We at the Secretariat fully respect Member States’ prerogatives and will be guided by Member States’ decisions.

In the meantime, we will not be idle in facilitating the implementation of TCBMs. In accordance with resolution 68/50, my office transmitted the GGE report to the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, the UN Disarmament Commission and the Conference on Disarmament for consideration. We also circulated the report to all other relevant United Nations entities.

My Office and OOSA have held regular meetings, including between Ms Di Pippo and myself, in order to ensure effective coordination on the implementation of TCBMs within our respective mandates. We have mapped out our respective roles. In short, we are fully prepared to put into place the cooperative mechanism envisaged in the GGE report – the cooperative mechanism that is needed to facilitate the implementation of TCBMs.

We will accelerate our joint work as soon as States agree on how they would like us to proceed.
I would also like to take this opportunity to remind all Member States to provide information on major military outer space expenditures for inclusion in the United Nations report on military expenditures. Eight States with known military assets operating in outer space made submissions to the Milex report. Unfortunately, however, none provided any information on their related space expenditures.

In conclusion, I’d like to remind all States why we have TCBMs: To reduce the risk of unintended conflict. At a time of growing uncertainty in the international security environment, these measures are needed more than ever.

I appeal to all States to build on the considerable work that has been done so far and find common ground for a way forward. And I hope today’s unprecedented joint meeting can be a starting point for that effort, rather than a one-time event.

Thank you.