Remarks to the Third ASEAN Regional Forum Workshop on Space Security

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Beijing
China
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Vice Foreign Minister, Ambassador Li Baodong

Distinguished Co-chairs, Mr. Frank Rose of the United States, Mr Vladimir Yermakov of the Russian Federation, and Mr Anouparb Vongnorkeo of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic

Ambassador Iijima of Japan

Excellencies, Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me first convey the best wishes and congratulations of UN Secretary-General Ban to the Chinese organisers through Ambassador Li Baodong and Director-General Wang and Deputy Director-General Dong Zhihua, and all participants from around the world for a successful workshop on the important topic of outer space.

Outside of the Secretary-General’s office at the UN headquarters in New York stands a UN flag that was flown to the Moon by astronauts of Apollo 14. It is, as the Secretary-General has said, a constant reminder “of our common humanity and our global quest to conquer shared challenges.”

Because that is what outer space is – a global common, the safety, security and sustainability of which must be preserved for all of humanity.

I want to thank the Co-Chairs for bringing together such a broad array of experts from government, academia and industry. I hope this workshop will deepen our understanding of how the international community can ensure the maintenance of outer space for peaceful uses by all inhabitants on Earth.

Since 1957, the United Nations, through its Member States, has been committed to this goal. The “Outer Space Treaty”, which entered into force in 1967, was a high water mark for arms control in outer space. It prohibited two things: first, the placement of weapons of mass destruction in orbit as well as their installation or stationing on celestial bodies; second, the establishment of military bases, the testing of any type of weapons and the conduct of military manoeuvres on celestial bodies.

As we move into the 21st Century, the outer space environment is becoming increasingly congested, contested and competitive. The increased utilization of outer space by States and commercial actors has led to growing concern over the prospects that an accident or miscalculation could escalate into a conflict. Vital space capabilities are increasingly at risk. The consequences of any mishap, misperceptions or miscalculation are also growing as we become more dependent on outer space.

For these reasons, there is a clear need for new additional measures to increase transparency and build confidence in outer space activities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

That is why I have welcomed progress by States on internationally agreed transparency and confidence-building measures, or TCBMs, on increasing the safety and security of outer space. This included most notably the 2013 consensus report by a group of governmental experts, or GGE, which recommended measures to help keep space free from conflict and to make it safe, secure and sustainable.
I have also welcomed the additional efforts to ensure that all States act responsibly when carrying out outer space activities. These efforts included most recently the international meeting convened by the European Union, under the able leadership of Professor Sergio Marchisio, on its proposal for an international code of conduct. That meeting contributed to the international discourse on the way forward and underscored a strong interest in undertaking any future negotiations within the framework of the United Nations through a mandate of the General Assembly.

Unfortunately, however, there remains a gap between Member States on the modalities for this work. I hope that this gap can be overcome with continued dialogue.

In the meantime, the General Assembly has both facilitated and encouraged renewed efforts to implement TCBMs. As recognized by the GGE, the implementation of TCBMs can assist in preventing military confrontation, enhancing clarity of intentions and increasing security and the long-term sustainability of outer space. These measures can be pursued through unilateral, bilateral and multilateral means. They can also form the basis for proposals, ultimately, for legally-binding approaches.

The unprecedented joint meeting held last month between the First and Fourth Committees resulted in substantive exchanges on the nexus between safety and security in outer space. I hope and believe this meeting will not be a one-time event.

I also welcome the unanimous adoption by the First Committee of the annual resolution on “Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures in Outer Space Activities”. The resolution was introduced by Russia and co-sponsored for a second consecutive year by China and the United States. This unanimity among all States was encouraging and underscores the importance that the international community affords to this issue. I hope that all space-faring nations continue to demonstrate leadership and unity of purpose in this regard.

Moving forward, I’d like to make two points.

First, existing machinery. States should make better use of the United Nations disarmament machinery, including the Disarmament Commission. I hope Member States will consider whether the Disarmament Commission, as a universal body, can take steps to promote the practical implementation of TCBMs. This would demonstrate that disarmament bodies can serve productive purposes and build consensus.

Second, Member States should heed the call, endorsed by the General Assembly, to provide information on major military outer space expenditures for inclusion in the United Nations report on military expenditures. A number of States with known military outer space assets made submissions to the annual report this year, yet none provided any information on their related space expenditures. I hope States provide a positive response in the coming year.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I started with the flag from Apollo 14, I want to conclude by quoting from another Apollo mission. The plaque left by the Apollo 11 crew reads, “Here Men from Planet Earth set foot upon the Moon [in] July 1969, A.D. We came in peace for all mankind.” Let us follow their example and work to ensure that space remains a safe and secure global common. I thank you.