



Statement of H.E. Archbishop Fortunatus Nwachukwu, Apostolic Nuncio,  
Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International  
Organizations in Geneva, Head of the Delegation of the Holy See to the third session of the  
**“Open-ended working group on reducing space threats through norms, rules and principles  
of responsible behaviours”**

*Geneva, 3 February 2023*

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Delegation of the Holy See wishes to thank you for your leadership and the preparatory work that went into this meeting. We found this approach useful in addressing existing international legal and normative frameworks, as well as in fostering common understandings. We are also grateful to other Delegations for sharing recommendations both in their statements and in the several Working Papers submitted in advance of this meeting.

Mr. Chair,

As one human family, we share our planet and its surroundings, including its many wonders and vulnerabilities. Given the increased reliance on outer space for civilian activities, and considering the consequences triggered by fierce competition among States for dominance in that arena, it is of paramount importance to preserve outer space exclusively for peaceful purposes, as a global commons. In this regard, it is also important to recall that information collected from space contributes to international peace and security, including by providing data critical for verifying compliance with disarmament and arms control treaties, as well as to facilitate humanitarian assistance.

Mr. Chair,

It is not by chance that Article 1 of the 1967 Outer Space treaty affirms that “the exploration and use of outer space [...] shall be the province of all mankind.”<sup>1</sup> Such an approach appears self-evident and is essential to preventing lawlessness and promoting the common good. At the same time, leveraging outer space for nefarious activities to the detriment of others would be contrary to this spirit.

Given our discussions during the past few days, it is clear that technological advancement and developments in outer space have been outpacing international governance and regulatory frameworks. Space activities are constantly evolving and instruments to address space security concerns should, at a minimum, progress in parallel, ideally anticipating future scenarios.

At the same time, there is also the emerging, growing concern that, as outer space becomes more economically viable and strategically important, it could become both a theatre and means to wage conflict. Therefore, we must respond by urgently adapting and building upon existing legal instruments, taking as a starting point the UN Charter and the Outer Space Treaty.

---

<sup>1</sup> Art. 1, Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies.

In this regard, worrying trends such as increased research and investments in anti-satellite and other counter-space capabilities, as well as increasing orbit congestions, space debris, and cyber warfare all contribute to rising threats. It is, therefore, the view of this Delegation that a verifiable comprehensive commitment banning first placement of all categories of weapons is fundamental. In addition, a multilateral commitment to prohibiting the development and testing of anti-satellite weapons, would contribute to enhancing collective security and responsibility.

Mr. Chair,

Our interactions will prove beneficial to the degree that we can agree on collectively shared norms and rules of “space traffic”. To help ensure respect for such rules, one possibility is to envisage a multilateral body to monitor the use of outer space and norms that regulate this use. One only need consider the chaos that would ensue if regulations and customary practices did not exist for air traffic, navigation at sea, or for road and rail transportation. As more and more States – and also private actors – establish their presence in space activities, the need for clear norms and regulations will become increasingly urgent. Furthermore, the element of subjectivity in the perception of threats can only be mitigated by agreeing on specific norms, rules and principles.

While welcoming transparency and confidence building measures, the Holy See would also support the negotiation of a comprehensive legally-binding instrument in the pertinent fora. Such an instrument would help preserve and guarantee outer space as an exclusively peaceful and sustainable environment, helping to prevent any future arms race.

Ultimately, ethical behavior in outer space should be guided by a sense of shared responsibility and oriented towards the common good, including for future generations. Indeed, it is imperative not to repeat the same mistakes in outer space that we have committed on Earth, such as violent conflict, the contamination of weapons, “deterrence” and the reckless exploitation of environmental resources. At the same time, norms, rules and principles for encouraging responsible behavior can be promoted through joint scientific projects. In this regard, joint scientific projects – such as a collective effort to clean space debris - would be a concrete step towards turning threats into opportunities, guided by the principle of human fraternity.

Mr. Chair,

Since time immemorial, the starry skies above have been a source of profound fascination and inspiration to all peoples, spread out across Earth. In a world regrettably rife with conflicts and injustices, let us not increase the risks but rather help create a culture of peace and fraternity for the future, space faring generations to come.

Thank you.