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UNGA68 First Committee: Thematic statement on Outer Space

28 October 2013

Statement by Ms Emily Street, First Secretary, Australian Permanent Mission to the United Nations

Mr Chairman,

In Outer Space, as in other realms of human endeavour, a rules-based approach to State activity is paramount for stability and security. Along with other Member States, Australia shares a deep interest in ensuring that access to space is protected for the benefit of all humanity.

The benefits of a peaceful and predictable space environment are clearly evident. Day by day the reliance of all nations upon services enabled by satellites and upon data gathered by satellites increases. Thus Australia places high value on current efforts to develop international norms to guide states' behaviour in space and to enhance cooperation and collaboration.

Australia has for some time supported the growing focus on transparency and confidence-building measures for space. We therefore welcome the consensus report (A/68/189) of the UN Group of Government Experts on Transparency and Confidence-building Measures in Outer Space Activities, established in response to UN General Assembly resolution 65/68. Although not a member of this GGE, Australia contributed to its work - through a substantive submission on the application of the broad range of existing international law to state activities in outer space. The GGE's report highlights the benefits of closer consultation and coordination between States to build trust and reduce potential for misperception and miscalculation in space. Accordingly, its conclusions and recommendations contribute to enhancing international security, and usefully complement the existing international legal framework pertaining to space.

Australia welcomes the GGE's endorsement of the development of multilateral codes of conduct to encourage responsible and peaceful use of space. In this regard, Australia places particular value on the European Union's proposal for an *International Code of Conduct for Outer Space Activities* to guide states' behaviour in space. An important component of the proposed Code is addressing the pressing problem of space debris, which threatens all nations' space-related activities alike.

Mr Chairman,

Australia holds that the proliferation of space debris, and particularly of long-lived space debris, constitutes a severe and imminent threat. Given the levels of investment in space-enabled infrastructure and the critical nature of the functions that this enables, failure to address this issue could have severe economic and strategic consequences. Thus there is an imperative to develop norms against the creation of further space debris, whether by accidental or deliberate means. Anti-satellite testing is highly likely to create debris, as we have seen in the past, and thus the development and testing of anti-satellite weapons is of concern in this regard. Australia has been actively supporting the development of the proposed Code of Conduct, and advocating that others do the same.

There is now increasing international understanding of the urgency of the problem, and the corresponding urgency for action in response. Momentum has been building around the initiative as involved countries work towards the second 'Open-ended Consultations' on the Code this November in Bangkok. Australia urges full participation in these important consultations, to ensure all voices are heard in the development of the Code. Broad participation will ensure that the Code represents a truly international view. This initiative is timely, it is practical, and it is in the interests of all nations as space users to protect our joint access to this precious resource.

The Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) is also making an important contribution to efforts to preserve the space environment through its Working Group on the Long Term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities. As Co-Chair with Italy of Expert Group D, Australia has taken the lead on developing a report on regulatory regimes and guidance for actors in the space arena. This report, along with reports from the other expert groups, will inform the work of the LTS Working Group and contribute to the preservation of the space environment for future generations.

Mr Chairman,

Space is a common resource. Thus there is a particular premium on a cooperative approach. In light of this, Australia has also been working with others in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) to encourage further consideration of space security. ARF Ministers noted this year the interest of ARF participants in continuing consideration of this issue, building on the successful ARF Space Security Workshop co-hosted with Vietnam in December 2012.

Space is an arena where actions taken by one have the potential to affect all. Australia therefore urges all nations to play a constructive role in securing a peaceful and sustainable environment for current and future generations.

Thank you.