

Conference on Disarmament
Thematic Debate on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space
Statement by Ambassador John Duncan
Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom

8 June 2006

Mr President, thank you for this opportunity to present views on behalf of the British Government on the topic of this week's thematic discussions, the prevention of an arms race in outer space. Discussions within the Conference on Disarmament this year have been some of the most engaging and constructive we have seen for some time and we hope this level of participation continues throughout this week's thematic debate and beyond.

The papers that my Russian and Chinese colleagues have circulated are a helpful starting point for a debate on a topic which is undoubtedly complex and one on which consensus is difficult to reach. We continue to believe that discussion on PAROS is at an early stage and that there are many unanswered questions, not least on defining the terms of the debate. For example, as the Russian and Chinese Compilation of Comments paper sets out, it is not a simple task to find a widely acceptable definition of what constitutes either "militarisation" or "weaponisation" of space. Views also differ on whether weapons used for the defensive or peaceful use of space would be classified in the same way as offensive space or anti-space capabilities.

The UK's position on PAROS and the military and civil use of space more generally remains unchanged. The focus of our policy on space is on civil and scientific uses, and we firmly believe that all states have the right to explore outer space and make the most of opportunities for scientific, economic, environmental and communications advances.

As well as these civil and scientific uses, the scope of military and national security activities in outer space has also grown. The security benefits the UK derives from the military use of space are important. Satellite communications, mapping, early warning, navigation, sensing and treaty verification are all integral to our national

security responsibilities. That said, I would like to stress that we have no plans to deploy weapons in space.

The right of all states to benefit from the exploration and use this unique shared environment is a universally accepted legal principle. It is the concern and responsibility of all states to ensure that these rights are realised in the interest of maintaining international peace and security. The cornerstone of international space law is the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, to which the UK is a Depository. This treaty places significant constraints on military activity in space: it bans the deployment of WMD in space and military activity on the moon and other celestial bodies. The UK continues to be a firm supporter.

Along with fellow EU member states, we regularly support resolution 60/54 on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS) at the United Nations General Assembly. And last year we supported the new resolution, 60/66, on Transparency and Confidence Building Measures in Outer Space Activities.

We do recognise that, as national security activities in space have grown, so have concerns by some states about the risk of an arms race in outer space. We understand that some states would wish to see additional and more extensive arms control measures. However, we do not believe that there is an international consensus on the need for further treaties or further legal codification.

Therefore, at this stage, we do not claim to have answers to the many unanswered questions, but we do plan to actively participate: our technical space expert, Dr. Damien Holden, will be taking part in the informal discussions tomorrow. This, along with the rest of the week's sessions, is a useful opportunity to discuss space issues collectively and we look forward to a frank and wide-ranging debate.