High Level Forum
Space as a driver for socio-economic sustainable development

Panel 2:
Making a difference: Working Together Towards Sustainable Space

Remarks by
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Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to have this opportunity to address this high-level forum in my capacity as High Representative for Disarmament Affairs. I wish to thank the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs and the United Arab Emirates for organizing this event.

I could not agree more with the theme for this high-level forum and panel. Sustainability is now recognized as a key organizing concept for transforming the world and for realizing the vision of the United Nations Charter.

With the landmark achievement last year of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the entry-into-force earlier this month of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, sustainability will be the cornerstone for many of our future efforts to achieve the broader goals of the United Nations.

The plan of action adopted by the General Assembly on the Sustainable Development Goals recognizes that the SDGs cannot be realized without peace and security; and peace and security will be at risk without sustainable development. These twin objectives are mutually reinforcing and inextricably linked.

There is no place else where this link is more evident than in outer space. Activities in outer space touch upon nearly every aspect of human life and economic development, and have the potential to create massive disruption. Moreover, our efforts to ensure peace and to increase security in outer space have always been grounded in the notion of sustainability, in name and in scope. And our long-term objective is to preserve outer space as a realm free of conflict.

Toward these ends, the United Nations has been pursuing a number of practical steps, starting with the promotion and implementation of transparency and confidence-building measures (TCBMs).

In general terms, TCBMs are means for sharing information with the aim of creating mutual understanding and trust, thereby reducing misperception and miscalculation. Transparency is the foundation of any confidence-building activity. Without confidence there can be no security.

TCBMs contribute to sustainability by helping to prevent military confrontation and to foster regional and global stability. They contribute to sustainability by building confidence in the peaceful intentions of States, thereby enhancing clarity in their long-term goals and creating conditions for a predictable strategic situation in both the economic and security arenas.

Finally, when applied in outer space, TCBMs can augment the safety, sustainability and security of day-to-day space operations that are increasingly interconnected with our broader goals, from economic development to the verification of arms control agreements.

However, we continue to face normative gaps and fundamental questions remain unanswered. The questions include the definition of a weapon in outer space. They also include the limits on the application of the right to self-defense, given the immense collateral harm that could be caused by the intentional destruction of satellites.

Until these questions are answered and the normative gaps are filled, all of our activities in outer space and everything that depends on it will remain at risk. Technological advances, including the spread of ground-based anti-satellite capabilities and as well as growing cyber capabilities are giving more States and even non-state actors an ability to strike or interfere.
with outer space assets. As our dependency on outer space grows, so too will our vulnerability and the devastating consequences of any mishap, whether by accident or design.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As reflected in the title of this session, cooperation is the key to ensuring peace and sustainability in outer space. There are those in the space community who have focused primarily on promoting cooperation in peaceful uses and exploration; there are others who have focused on matters of disarmament and international security. It is important to recognize that these are not two incompatible perspectives, but rather two sides of the same coin.

To make progress, we need to break through these silos and work together to address problems simultaneously. It is in that spirit that I welcome the first joint ad hoc session of the First and Fourth Committees, which was the beginning of a new consensus by the three largest space-faring nations. It is that consensus that has opened the door to begin discussions in the UN Disarmament Commission (UNDC) on outer space, including the issue of TCBMs. I welcome the UNDC taking up this issue, further to its status as the only universal deliberative body. I have no doubt that this will have a beneficial effect, through allowing Member States to overcome the siloed discourse that has too often characterized discussions up until this point.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In closing, while our norm-building efforts perpetually struggle to keep pace with technological developments, I am optimistic that our deliberative bodies and implementing agencies are on the right track. The UN's work in ensuring security and sustainability in outer space is becoming more integrated and interconnected. I have no doubt that this positive trend will continue in the years ahead.

At the same time, to avoid falling behind we must redouble our efforts to make up for the growing gap in the implementation of agreed commitments and in the development of new norms. I believe that the General Assembly and its subsidiary bodies, especially COPUOS and the Disarmament Commission, should continue to play a leading role in advancing this agenda. ODA remains ready to assist all stakeholders in partnership in their efforts to make use of these bodies to advance this worthy endeavor.

Thank you.