



**Opening remarks by Mr. Sergei A. Ordzhonikidze
United Nations Under-Secretary-General
Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva
“Space Security 2009: Moving towards a Safer Space Environment”**

**Palais des Nations, Council Chamber
Opening Session: Monday, 15 June 2009, 09:00 to 09:45 a.m.**

**Ms. Hitchens
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen:**

It is a great pleasure to welcome you all to the Palais des Nations. I appreciate the opportunity to continue the tradition of opening this conference on space security organized by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research. This annual event has become an important feature of the disarmament calendar in Geneva. The high calibre of the speakers taking part here testifies to the emphasis that disarmament diplomats and other experts place on this forum for exchange.

Disarmament in outer space is critical to ensuring strategic stability. That is why over the past couple of years, I have ended my statements at these events with a call to the Conference on Disarmament to find common ground and begin substantive work on the critical issue of space security, in particular the prevention of an arms race in outer space.

But, this year, we open our conference in a more positive environment for multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation. The bilateral negotiations between the US and the Russian Federation on new and verifiable reductions in their strategic offensive arsenals through a legally-binding treaty represent a welcome development towards greater global stability through disarmament. Similarly, the positive tone that marked the Third Preparatory Committee of the 2010 NPT Review Conference in May signifies a shift from previous years. And only a few weeks ago, in this room, the Conference on Disarmament adopted a Programme of Work. In a spirit of compromise and flexibility, the Conference members broke a stalemate that had lasted some 12 years.

The Programme of Work includes the establishment of a Working Group “to discuss substantively, without limitation, all issues related to the prevention of an arms race in outer space”. This Programme of Work opens, from my point of view, new perspectives in the discussions of the prevention of an arms race in outer space, and could pave the way for practical steps to strengthen the norms, institutions and legal regimes concerning space security.

We may not yet have been able to define where outer space begins and where it ends, but there is no doubt that it is indispensable to our everyday lives. Almost 7,000 satellites have been launched into Earth’s orbit since the first space launch in 1957, with some nine hundred space satellites operated by more than forty countries now in orbit. Telecommunications, television, navigation, enhanced warning systems for natural disasters, support for recovery activities, weather forecasting and agricultural planning, and natural resource protection all depend on the peaceful use of outer space. Together, these activities make a considerable contribution to the world economy and to consumers across the globe.

The preservation of the peaceful use of space is of interest to all countries – whether they are space-capable or space-faring, or not. Space exploration generates technological innovation that is essential in accelerating development. The space industry is important in meeting connectivity needs, as satellite communications provide access in remote and isolated communities to bridge the so-called digital divide. I know that you will return to this issue in greater detail with the presentation by my colleague, Mr. Touré, of the International Telecommunication Union. Space technologies are of critical importance in monitoring the pace and the extent of global warming. This plays a central role in informing and directing our efforts to address this existential threat.

The International Space Station, which celebrates its 10th anniversary this year, is a compelling example of the benefits of a collaborative approach to space research. As one of the most complex scientific endeavours ever undertaken, it involves support from five space agencies, representing 16 nations. Even if space may be the final frontier, there should not be any borders in our cooperation there.

We may not have our heads in the clouds, but our collective terrestrial well-being is certainly closely linked with our celestial progress. Any interruption of the use of outer space would disrupt our daily lives. Preventing a weaponization of outer space is fundamental to our collective security.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

With benefits comes responsibility. And with dependence comes vulnerability. It is the combination of these four factors that makes the need to take action for greater space security so urgent.

Many space systems and their applications are of dual use. As technology advances in space, the likelihood of space becoming a conflict arena increases.

For its part, the United Nations has played a leading role in establishing principles to ensure that outer space and space activities continue to enhance the well-being of all countries and humankind. This Organization has brokered international treaties providing for the non-appropriation of outer space by any one country, freedom of exploration, liability for damage caused by space objects, space safety and rescue, notification and registration of space activities, dispute settlement and the scientific investigation and exploitation of natural resources in outer space.

The 1967 Outer Space Treaty has so far provided the basic framework of international space law. The 1963 Treaty banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, the 1972 Convention on International Liability for Damage Caused by Space Objects and the 1975 Convention on Registration of Objects Launched into Outer Space are milestones. Likewise, the 1979 Agreement Governing the Activities of States on the Moon and other Celestial Bodies and the 1976 Convention on the Prohibition of Military and other Hostile Use of Environmental Modification Techniques represent considerable achievements in the ongoing efforts to reserve the use of outer space for peaceful and scientific purposes.

But, the record of implementation, coupled with technological developments and capabilities, have demonstrated that these instruments do not offer a comprehensive solution to current and future challenges to space security. All of these legal instruments were agreed and adopted during the Cold War. Given the rapid pace of technological

innovation in space, there is a clear need to update the legal regime to address today's challenges. This is why the breakthrough in the Conference of Disarmament is so critically important.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

As the human family, it is our obligation to preserve the benign nature of outer space – and to put in place mechanisms to realize this goal. Space is our common heritage. But it is not a foregone conclusion that it will stay that way.

We need to build on the trend towards better relations among States to advance all areas of disarmament, including in outer space. Legally binding instruments, transparency and confidence-building measures must be combined to achieve security in outer space. I firmly believe that all areas of disarmament are connected and that progress in one area will have a positive impact on developments in other fields of disarmament – and vice versa.

At the global level, we have made significant progress with respect to small arms and light weapons and anti-personnel landmines. These are important achievements for human security. We need to apply the same political will to strategic disarmament.

In the field of outer space, initiatives such as the Chinese-Russian draft treaty on the “Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space, the Threat or Use of Force Against Outer Space Objects (PPWT)”, the EU draft Code of Conduct for Outer Space Activities and Canadian proposals all help to facilitate the process towards greater global security.

A shared sense of urgency and political will are indispensable. This can best be nurtured through partnerships. I therefore welcome the participation today of representatives of Governments, international organizations, academia, industry and civil society. When we pool our resolve and our resourcefulness we can formulate strong solutions to the challenges we face.

Let me conclude with a few words of warning: the longer we wait before taking action, the more difficult it will be to elaborate effective disarmament measures in outer space. This is

true for all fields of disarmament, but even more so for outer space where technology advances so quickly. And if we cannot make progress on outer space security, I doubt that we will be able to do it in other areas. At the same time, success in the preservation of outer space for peaceful purposes could have a positive effect on other fields.

As the latest figures from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute demonstrate, the global military expenditure has now topped 1.4 trillion dollars annually. These figures show that we cannot overemphasize the urgency of our task. We must seize the momentum.

This conference could not be more timely. I hope that the discussions over the coming two days will provide practical ideas that may feed into the ongoing debates on this issue, not least in the discussions now to take place in the context of the Conference on Disarmament.

Thank you very much.