

# **Zero-Weapon Outer Space: Foundation for a Safer Space Environment**

Presentation by Chinese Delegation  
at the UNIDIR Conference on Space Security 2009  
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Mr. Chairman,

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Dear Colleagues,

It is a privilege for me to speak at the annual UNIDIR outer space conference, which has become a great venue for experts and officials to share information and exchange views. Such a gathering is of particular importance ahead of the forthcoming substantive work on PAROS in the Conference on Disarmament later this year.

Mr. Chairman,

Over the past five decades, the exploration and exploitation of outer space has given a giant impetus to the development of humankind. The outer space, like the land, the ocean and the sky, has become an integral part of our life on which we increasingly depend. Peaceful use of outer space has thus become the common aspiration of peoples of all nations.

Looking into the future, our life will become even more dependent on outer space. It is estimated by the Euroconsult that over 1,100 satellites will be launched between 2009 and 2018. It is in the interest of all states to keep our outer space assets sound and safe and away from armed conflicts. To that end, one fundamental element is to keep outer space free of weapons, namely, to maintain a zero-weapon outer space.

The meaning of zero-weapon outer space is three-folded. Firstly, countries do not place any weapon in outer space, either offensive or defensive. In other word, there shall be no space-based weapons. Secondly, countries do not use force against outer space objects. Such force may come from ground-based, sea-based, or air-borne weapons, or even from hostile activities of certain space objects other than space-based weapons. Thirdly, countries do not threaten to use force against outer space objects. This may include test of weapons in outer space or against space objects as well as other hostile activities endangering space objects.

**Some may argue that the aforesaid steps are unnecessary since there are no weapons in outer space at present.**

By nature, the ideas and actions towards a zero-weapon outer space are preventive measures. It is true that so far there are still no weapons in outer space, but the dangers are out there. The deployment of weapons in outer space or use or threat of use for against outer space objects would bring unimaginable consequence. Outer space assets of all countries would be endangered, peaceful use of outer space threatened, and international peace and security undermined. No one could question such potential dangers.

During the Cold War, we witnessed an arms race in outer space. Since 1960s, a number of tests for various ASAT weapons took place in outer space, even ASAT by use of nuclear explosion. In addition to numerous space debris, one more serious consequence of such tests is the sophistication of conventional ASAT weapons.

The end of the Cold War has not dispelled the shadow of weaponization of outer space. The efforts to develop and deploy weapons in outer space have been going on quietly, and relevant military doctrine is taking shape. A recent report issued by an independent working group openly advocated placement of space-based interceptors like Brilliant Pebbles in outer space to build up a more robust and reliable missile defense system.

Prevention is always better than remedying the consequences. The history of the development of nuclear weapons constantly reminds us that once outer space weapons become full-fledged, how difficult it would be to control them and to prevent their proliferation, let alone eliminating them. We simply cannot afford to delay actions or wait until the deployment of weapons and an arms race in outer space have become a reality. At the end of the first decade of the 21st century, we should be wise enough to draw lessons from the past by taking preventive efforts to maintain a zero-weapon outer space.

**Some may wonder whether it is the time to work on a zero-weapon outer space, especially when we are facing so many issues related to outer space activities.**

It is true that the challenge related to outer space security is multifaceted and it is also true that each and every country has its own policy priority. It does not matter whether it is in the past or at present, the developed and developing countries alike are always interested and concerned with outer space activities and have made a lot of proposals regarding outer space security issue. They are all of great value, as they represent an important aspect of the complicated issue.

To focus on zero-weapon outer space does not mean disregarding other useful proposals. On the contrary, we are in favor of an inclusive PAROS process which will contribute to a comprehensive solution to issues related to outer space security.

Recently, the CD has adopted a decision to establish a programme of work for the 2009 session, in which a working group on PAROS has established. The time and conditions to realize a zero-weapon outer space are right and ripe.

Firstly, we enjoy broad political support, growing awareness and greater common ground on the importance of PAROS in the international community. Since early 1980s, the UNGA has annually adopted, by overwhelming majority, the resolution on PAROS, calling for the negotiation of an international agreement on PAROS.

Secondly, we have the working experience of an Ad Hoc Committee dealing with PAROS within the CD. For 10 consecutive years from 1985 to 1994, an Ad Hoc Committee had worked on definition, principles, existing legal instruments and confidence-building measures, etc..... Though the Committee did not achieve tangible results given the circumstances in those years, it surely provides useful guidance for our work today.

Last but not least, we already have the basis for substantive work on a new legal instrument on outer space at hand. In 2002, seven countries, namely, Russia, China, Indonesia, Belarus, Vietnam, Zimbabwe and Syria, jointly presented to the CD a working paper entitled "Possible Elements for a Future International Legal Agreement on the Prevention of the Deployment of Weapons in Outer Space, the Threat or Use of Force Against Outer Space Objects", contained in CD/1679. The document contains detailed proposals on all essential elements of a new legal instrument on outer space. In the following years, China and Russia had jointly submitted to the CD four thematic papers regarding definition, verification, transparency and confidence-building measures, etc.. In 2008, China and Russia jointly submitted to the CD a draft Treaty on the

Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space, the Threat or Use of Force against Outer Space Objects (PPWT), as contained in CD/1839, which reflects many views expressed during several rounds of substantive discussions on the aforementioned documents. The draft PPWT was well received by the majority of member states of the CD. The document may need further improvement, but it can be used as a good basis or a starting point for future work towards a new international legally-binding instrument.

**Some would still ask that we recognize the rationale and virtue of a zero-weapon outer space, but does it have to be a legally binding instrument? What about political commitments on the same idea?**

The answer to this question would be short and, in turn, can be answered in the form of another question: "If a country is already politically committed to a zero-weapon outer space, why not make it legally-binding to make it more effective?" While political will is of vital importance for states to build trust and confidence, legal framework will make such trust and confidence obligatory and enforceable.

Besides, we all witnessed the significant contribution made by existing international legal instruments governing outer space activities to prevent arms race in outer space. Unfortunately, the 1967 Outer Space Treaty and the 1979 Moon Agreement, apparently have certain loopholes or limitations. In order to fundamentally safeguard peace and security in outer space and to prevent an arms race in outer space, a new international legal instrument is obviously needed.

Mr Chairman,

To sum up, it is absolutely necessary for us to start work now to realize a zero-weapon outer space by establishing an internationally legally-binding instrument. And the future work of PAROS in the CD may serve this purpose well.

We believe an ambitious working programme should be adopted by CD regarding PAROS, starting with substantive discussion on PPWT and reviving all relevant proposals that contribute to the security of outer space. In this regard, we are open to proposals such as world-wide ban on ASAT, which is, in our view, in line with the PPWT and could be well incorporated into this document. China is ready to exchange views with all interested parties, both bilaterally and multilaterally, on the issues related to a zero-weapon outer space.

Mr. Chairman,

We are now at a historical juncture. Sticking to the doomed remedial philosophy, we may lose the golden opportunity to keep outer space away from armed conflicts. Be creative and proactive, we will take a critical step forward and embrace the age of a zero-weapon outer space, which will mark the 21st century as a peak in human civilization.