REMARKS

By

Angela Kane
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

An International Code of Conduct as a contribution to Transparency and Confidence Building Measures in Outer Space Activities

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Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, at the outset, please allow me to express my appreciation to the delegation of the European Union for organizing this side event and for inviting me to address you today.

For half a century, the United Nations has sought the ways and means of ensuring peace and security in the domain of outer space. During the Cold War, these efforts were aimed at preserving international stability. In the past two decades, they have also become focused on ensuring the long-term sustainability of the outer space environment.

Before last year, the previous Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on this topic concluded its work in 1993. Though its voluminous study recognized a clear need for confidence building, we had to wait 20 years before another GGE could endorse specific measures.

Before I talk about the relevance of a Code of Conduct to the implementation of transparency and confidence-building measures (TCBMs) in outer space, I would like to briefly remark on the significance of what the 2013 Group achieved.

Over the past several years, the deterioration of the international security environment has jeopardized the potential for progress in many areas of arms control. The process of reducing and eliminating nuclear weapons has slowed dramatically and no new negotiations are underway. Many key commitments undertaken at the 2010 NPT Review Conference remain unfulfilled. There remain deep-seated disagreements over the deployment of missile defences and the posture of military alliances.

Yet, it was amidst this backdrop that, between 2012 and 2013, a highly distinguished group of governmental experts, representing East, West, North and South, was able to reach agreement on concrete measures aimed at increasing transparency and building confidence in outer space. Whereas virtually all other realms of strategic arms control have remained stagnant and deadlocked, outer space continued to be one area where progress and cooperation have prevailed.

The conclusions and recommendations of the GGE covered many areas. These included, among others: Information exchange on space policies; Information exchange and notifications related to outer space activities; Risk reduction notifications; Contact and visits to space launch sites and facilities; International cooperation; and Consultative mechanisms.

The Group, however, left one part of its work unfinished; namely political measures that could provide rules of the road for responsible and predictable use of outer space. Indeed, it goes without saying that many types of political measures could contribute to building confidence in outer space activities.

While the Group did not include any such measures in its report, it importantly endorsed efforts to pursue political commitments, for example, in the form of unilateral declarations, bilateral commitments or a multilateral code of conduct, to encourage responsible actions in, and the peaceful use of, outer space. It also concluded that voluntary political measures can form the basis for consideration of concepts and proposals for legally binding obligations.
Clearly, the efforts spearheaded by the European Union to advance an International Code of Conduct for Outer Space Activities fall within the scope of the political commitments endorsed by the Group. The development of such a Code would be one of many plausible next steps that could advance the implementation of TCBMs.

I think it is fair to say that the open-ended consultative process supported by UNIDIR has enabled key actors to discuss in concrete terms many aspects of the proposed draft Code. There is now widespread support for this work to enter into a negotiating phase and I am pleased that many would like to see this taken forward under the auspices of the United Nations.

I very much hope to see the early commencement of multilateral negotiations leading to the adoption of an International Code with the widest possible participation. My Office stands ready to support such a process.

In the meantime, ODA, in close cooperation with both UNIDIR and the Office for Outer Space Affairs, is taking concrete steps to support the conclusions and recommendations of the GGE. In particularly, we are exploring the means to pursue outreach at the international level, focusing on the international bodies responsible for outer space issues, as well as at the regional level.

I would like to conclude my remarks with the observation that the rapidly growing number and diversity of entities that operate outer space assets is continuing to drive fundamental changes in the outer space environment. These changes give a strong sense of urgency to efforts aimed at keeping outer space free from destabilizing conflict and to making it safe, secure and sustainable in the long term for the benefit of all humankind.

Let us continue to work closely together to sustain and advance this essential component of multilateral dialogue on this critical strategic security issue.

Thank you.