STATEMENT

BY

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DURING THE THEMATIC DEBATE ON THE PREVENTION
OF AN ARMS RACE IN OUTER SPACE (PAROS)

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Thank you, Chairperson,

It is widely acknowledged that outer space and its exploration for peaceful purposes is playing a vital and ever increasing role in our daily lives. It is therefore important to ensure that substantive work is undertaken to prevent it from becoming a new arena for conflict. It is in this context, that South Africa welcomes the draft Treaty presented by China and Russia in the Conference on Disarmament (CD) on the Prevention of Placement of Weapons in Outer Space, the Threat or Use of Force against Outer Space Objects (PPWT). This proposal could serve as a useful basis for further discussions in terms of the elements and scope of future legally-binding instruments that may be required to prevent an arms race in outer space.

South Africa believes that the best way to promote order, safety, security and the sustainability of outer space activities and to preserve outer space as a domain for peaceful activities is through international cooperation and dialogue. We will therefore continue to support and engage international efforts to develop rules of the road and norms for behaviour in space. In order to achieve the widest possible adherence to such rules and norms, there is no alternative to open and transparent multilateral processes, in which all interested States can participate on an equal basis. Key to such efforts is the extent to which all States are able to gain access to and benefit from outer space, regardless of their level of scientific, technical and economic development.

An integral component of our efforts to sustain outer space as an area for exclusively peaceful purposes is the need to adopt preventative measures to ensure that space does not become the next arena for conflict and, consequently, that an arms race in outer space does not become a reality. Some arguments have been advanced to the effect that an arms race in outer space does not exist at present. Some proponents of these arguments maintain that it is therefore premature to focus on issues related to the weaponisation of outer space.

While we welcome the general pledge not to allow space to become the next theatre of war and conflict, it is clear to my delegation that the weaponisation of outer space by one player could prompt others to do the same, which may well lead to an arms race in outer space. If we wait for space to become weaponised before we take action, it will not be long before we have to find yet another cure for something that could have been prevented. My delegation believes that this should and can be prevented if we take action now. It is for this reason that South Africa remains supportive of the earliest commencement of negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament on a legally-binding instrument or instruments on PAROS.

Chairperson,
Beyond the commencement of negotiations in the CD on PAROS, the work of the United Nations Committee of the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNCOPUOS) should also be intensified, particularly on those non-weapon issues that may impact on the long-term sustainability of outer space activities, including space debris, which remains an issue of concern to all of us.

Chairperson,

Given the continued impasse in the CD, South Africa supports the proposal by China and Russia to establish a Group of Governmental Experts to examine possible instruments aimed at preventing an arms race in outer space, including a legally-binding one to prevent the placement of weapons in outer space. It is our hope that this GGE will stimulate discussions on the subject so as to enable progress towards the commencement of negotiations on a legally-binding instrument or instruments.

I thank you Chairperson.