



AUSTRALIA



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Statement by John Quinn, Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva and Ambassador for Disarmament

Thank you co-chairs and distinguished key-note speakers for your enlightening presentations.

Australia welcomes this innovative and exceptional opportunity to meet in this setting to discuss the cross-cutting nature of space issues.

Like others here today, we recognise that the space domain is becoming increasingly congested and contested – from orbital debris to anti-satellite weapon threats.

It is important, therefore, that we work together in a coordinated fashion to focus international attention on these pressing issues and discuss ways we can collectively ensure the long-term sustainability of outer space as a common good.

We must keep open minds as to how we can pragmatically contribute to this endeavour.

We recognise there are a range of tools available that the international community can use to preserve a stable and secure space environment for all.

There have been useful exchanges on the key principles of the norms of behaviour that help preserve outer space for the global common good, including promoting the sustainable development goals (SDGs)..

One option is to pursue a legally binding treaty. While this is indeed a worthwhile longer term ambition, there are important non-legally binding Transparency and Confidence Building Measures (TCBMs) we should undertake as soon as practicable before launching into what will be complex and protracted negotiations on a legally binding treaty. These TCBMs cover both civilian and military uses of outer space.

The value of developing TCBMs has already been recognised by the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on outer space TCBMs – whose report was adopted without a vote by the UN General Assembly in July 2013. We welcome the prominence given to TCBMs in our discussions today.

We also urge completion of the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) guidelines on the long-term sustainability of space, earlier discussed by Mr Martinez.

For Australia, the proliferation of space debris is a major concern. Orbital debris affects not only increasing numbers of space-faring states but now all states as we all rely day to day to varying degrees on a range of space-enabled services which depend on satellites.

We are concerned that, if the proliferation of space debris is left unchecked, we will reach a tipping point that will render space too expensive or dangerous for our collective use.

Strengthening the current norm against creating further space debris could be one very useful cause for the international community to rally behind.

Australia will actively consider all the issues and ideas that are raised in today's joint sitting. We remain flexible, pragmatic and open-minded on the best way forward.

In conclusion, let me add that a key objective for Australia is to pursue practical initiatives in an inclusive and consultative manner, and avoid the polarisation that has bedevilled space security issues in the recent past.

We would welcome continuing UN attention to space issues pursued in a constructive spirit, including through the proposed Secretary-General's report to the General Assembly at its seventy second session and further discussions on 'Transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities' at next year's UNGA session.