

## **Informal Intersessional Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on further practical measures for the prevention of an arms race in outer space (PAROS)**

Statement by Project Ploughshares

Delivered by Dr. Jessica West

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**T**hank-you Chair for the opportunity to address this informal intersessional meeting. I would like to express my appreciation of the hard work and creativity that you and state delegates have committed to this process, and for taking the time to meet in this setting with those of us not party to the discussion. I am encouraged by your description of the work to date and note that it builds on many of the themes of the Open-Ended Working Group.

My name is Jessica West and I am a Senior Researcher at Project Ploughshares, an organisation dedicated to peace and security through arms control and disarmament, including in Outer Space.

The goal of avoiding weapons and the use of force in outer space remains a key aspiration of the international community and a guiding principle of PAROS. But achieving this aspiration is tied to a larger vision that has evolved over the decades to include the prevention of conflict and the conditions for peace more broadly, including secure use and sustainable benefits of space for all. Finding practical ways to achieve this goal is the worthy work of this Group.

In addition to changes in how we conceptualize and approach PAROS today, I would add that our understanding of arms control has likewise evolved and requires a broader and more inclusive approach than in the past. A study of lessons learned from other domains conducted by Project Ploughshares – which you can find [online](#) – indicates that arms control is not a discrete or singular agreement but should instead be thought of as a broader regime of security governance with several interconnected parts that include:

- a) Norms, rules, and principles;
- b) Restrictions and obligations;
- c) Tools for implementation, verification, and confidence; and
- d) Means and mechanisms to facilitate ongoing communication and engagement.

In other words: we require many paths forward, moving in the same direction. This is an iterative process. Efforts here should focus on how to supply various pieces of such a regime in a way that works within and expands up on existing space governance and other initiatives.

The following three points provide a basis for progress.

## **1. We must implement and build on what is already in place**

Arms control and conflict prevention efforts in outer space are not starting from scratch.

A key contribution of the previous OEWG on reducing space threats was a detailed discussion of existing agreements that govern activities in outer space, including military ones. *Universal recognition of and adherence to these agreements must provide the foundation of any new initiatives.* The core framework is the Outer Space Treaty. Among the clearest expressions of military restrictions in outer space, it prohibits placement in orbit, installation, or stationing of any objects carrying nuclear weapons or any other kinds of weapons of mass destruction.

This prohibition is essential not only from a moral and legal perspective, but also for realizing the objectives of Article 1 of the Treaty, namely access to, use, and benefit of outer space for all. Per Victoria's remarks: there is no way to use nuclear weapons in space or on Earth that is not devastating. In this regard I echo Mexico's call for the complete elimination of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons.

As the delegate from Russia noted, there are numerous other relevant agreements that must be upheld in the context of space activities, include the Partial Test Ban Treaty, the Environmental Modification Convention, and I would add weapons restraints required of International Humanitarian Law, including those that by nature have indiscriminate effects.

This existing foundation of arms control provides a basis for thinking about additional concrete restrictions in space.

## **2. Moving forward, we must think inclusively about PAROS**

The OEWG discussion demonstrated that security in and of outer space is a universal concern. This means that PAROS must respond to the diversity of values to be protected in outer space, and address threats related to outer space in an inclusive manner.

New perspectives can help.

Recent consultations held by Project Ploughshares on inclusive and diverse approaches to peace and security in outer space echo the points made by Canada, specifically the value of incorporating humanitarian and gender-sensitive understandings of harm, and I would add environmental perspectives as well. These approaches have been essential to advancing multilateral arms control in other domains. Weapons are a key concern of these perspectives. On that note, we add our appreciation to states who have committed themselves not to conduct destructive anti-satellite missile tests in outer space.

But these human-oriented perspectives also help to illuminate threats that might not

be captured by the traditional concept of weaponization or use of force, such as such as non-kinetic interference with space systems critical to civilian uses and infrastructure, the indiscriminate environmental effects of weapons and their testing, and growing militarization. Critically, these are harms that we know are already taking place. And they must be included in efforts at sustaining peace and the ability for all states and peoples to use and benefit from outer space.

Incorporating such diverse perspectives necessitates diverse participation among all stakeholders, including civil society.

### **3. We must prioritize tools for effective implementation and mutual confidence**

Without confidence in implementation, any new agreement is meaningless.

To aid effective compliance, definitions, verification, and monitoring efforts should be pursued together to answer the question “how do we know?” This ability to know is essential and also difficult in the context of outer space, where dual-purpose technology and dual-uses of space systems can obscure the nature of capabilities, intentions, and harms.

Once again, we are not starting from scratch: we know what works from other domains. And what works is the layering of tools and approaches. Combining rules and restrictions related to both capabilities and behaviours or uses, for example, has worked in the context of chemical weapons. And TCBMs are core to all arms control agreements.

This combination of approaches also helps with building confidence and verification.

Many pieces of this puzzle are already in place, including existing tools for definitions and verification such as UNIDIR and Secure World Foundation lexicon, the development of norms of behaviour, pre-notification practices, and commitments to enhance information sharing, access to space situational awareness, and lines of communication and consultation in the 2013 GGE and 2023 Disarmament Commission document. One objective of this group should be identify how these existing resources can be leveraged to support additional agreements on PAROS, and to articulate what specific gaps need to be filled.

I would emphasize that this ability to know – to have confidence in the implementation of PAROS objectives – must be community wide. And to remind delegates that non-state actors including private sector and civil society organizations – have an important role to play.

**Looking ahead** to the two parallel OEWG processes that have been mandated by the General Assembly, I would urge the GGE to make recommendations on how each can fulfill the various pieces of the broader PAROS puzzle in complimentary ways. There is no single tool that can maintain peace and security in outer space and preventing it from succumbing to the scourge of warfare. But it is essential that various initiatives work collaboratively to do so.

In closing I would echo the request from New Zealand to make public all working papers of the Group and appreciate your offer to accept papers from non-participants including civil society.

Thank-you.



Project Ploughshares is a Canadian peace research institute with a focus on disarmament efforts and international security, specifically related to the arms trade, emerging military and security technologies, nuclear weapons, and outer space.

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