



**Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the UN
Geneva**

**Statement by Ambassador Bilal Ahmad, Permanent Representative, at the
Plenary Meeting of the Conference on Disarmament
28 March 2024**

Mr. President,

Thank you for convening this plenary meeting.

We associate ourselves with the statement of G-21 delivered by Algeria.

Mr. President,

As our dependence on outer space in our daily lives has increased, so have the threats and likelihood of a conflict in or from outer space.

The most visible manifestation of this is the unstoppable arms race, weaponization of outer space, and its increasing characterization as the next warfighting frontier in policies and doctrines of major powers.

The mutually reinforcing nature of defensive and offensive capabilities such as the deployment of missile defence systems and their amalgamation with outer space systems is adversely impacting strategic stability at the global and regional levels. Destabilizing capabilities such as Anti-Satellite Weapons (ASAT) and directed energy weapons are being complemented by non-kinetic capabilities. Modern weapons increasingly rely on space-based technologies. There is a significant risk that warfighting on the ground, at

sea and in the air could spill over to outer space—or be triggered by dynamics there.

Let us make no mistake. Any conflict, if it erupts in or originates from outer space will not just remain limited to that domain. It will have devastating consequences on our daily lives and its effects will be far and wide across various domains. All states, even those, which may not have any space assets will be affected. Similarly, conflicts taking place on the earth are increasingly likely to be projected in outer space as well.

Mr. President,

In this backdrop, the urgency of undertaking meaningful actions has never been greater.

The agenda item on Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS) was first added to CD's agenda in 1982. It is regrettable that there has been no progress under this item for over four decades.

At first, some denied the possibility of an arms race in outer space. Then, they said it was too late to prevent its militarization and called for focus on non-weaponization instead. And it is now being asserted that given its dual-use nature, the only pragmatic way to make progress is to focus efforts exclusively on behaviours while ignoring capabilities. This framing is tenuous at best and at worst risks legitimizing the weaponization of outer space.

Space security is currently undergoing a crisis of framing. Divisions on how to pursue space security have sharpened as we see launch of competing processes and divergences in conceptual approaches.

How can we bridge these divisions?

Pakistan believes that a comprehensive approach that includes a dual focus on both capabilities and behaviours offers the best pathway for progress, as has been the case in several legally-binding and non-legally binding measures developed in other fields of disarmament.

Pakistan has consistently advocated for advancing negotiations on a legally binding instrument on PAROS. Concurrently, we have also actively contributed to non-legally binding measures such as Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures (TCBMs). We recognize the complementary relationship between the two approaches. Historically, non-legally binding measures have contributed to the development of legally binding instruments and hold the potential to do so in the future. However, it is crucial to underline that TCBMs neither serve as a substitute nor a conditional first step for such binding instruments. Pursuing non-legally binding measures should not divert our attention from legally-binding instruments.

It is regrettable that a handful of states continue to block the start of negotiations on legal instruments in the Conference on Disarmament citing definitional and verification related issues without explaining how such negotiations would affect their security interests. The naysayers have also not explained why definitional and verification issues cannot be taken up during the negotiations – an approach that they advocate for another agenda item of this Conference.

Mr. President,

Past shapes present and future. It is clear that technological or military monopolies of the few do not last for too long. Diffusion of technology follows. Other states also acquire capabilities to address asymmetries and threat perceptions. Risks of acquisition by unauthorized actors increase. For these very reasons, it is both urgent and prudent to prevent weaponization of outer space.

A holistic approach to security, rather than a piecemeal or a selective one, in outer space remains the most viable option to make progress under this agenda item.

The rich body of work on PAROS at the CD provides us with more than ample substance to commence work.

We hope all CD members would do their part in preserving the international consensus on PAROS and contribute to the development of effective legal measures to mitigate the full spectrum of space threats and risks emanating from a militarized, contested and congested outer space. Given that the outer space is province of all mankind, the benefits of prevention of weaponization and an arms race in outer space would be in the interests of all.

I thank you.
