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Sending 14 Drafts to General Assembly, First Committee Defeats Motion Questioning Its Competence to Approve One Aimed at Tackling Outer Space Threats

The First Committee (Disarmament and International Security) today approved 14 drafts, among them several aimed at stemming the spread of illicit weapons on Earth and at preventing a celestial arms race, and also defeated a motion questioning its competence to approve a text on reducing threats in outer space.

Prior to taking up a basket of drafts on the disarmament aspects of outer space, delegates defeated a motion proposed by the Russian Federation that the Committee has no competence to approve a draft resolution on reducing celestial threats through norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours, by a recorded vote of 15 in favour to 102 against, with 33 abstentions. The challenge to the Committee's competence over the issue emerged during its meeting on 4 November. (For more information, please see Press Release [GA/DIS/3657](#).)

The Committee went on to approve that draft, by a recorded vote of 150 in favour to 12 against, with 8 abstentions (Angola, Armenia, Belarus, Bolivia, India, Israel, Nigeria, Palau), after separate recorded votes were held to retain three of its paragraphs. One provision would have the General Assembly encourage Member States to study existing and potential threats and security risks to space systems and share their ideas on the further development and implementation of norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours.

During an explanation of vote, the Russian Federation's delegate said the draft was an attempt to refocus the efforts of Member States towards the development of amorphous rules in outer space that will only serve to erode the fundamental concepts of preventing an arms race in the realm. Several delegates, including Cuba's representative, echoed Moscow's concern that issues within the draft were better suited for consideration in the Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization).

Several Member States explained their delegations' vote in favour of the draft, saying it promotes collective efforts to reduce space threats. Egypt's representative, speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, said the draft sought to develop legally binding instruments related to access to outer space.

Divergent views on how best to prevent a celestial arms race resurfaced when the Committee approved a draft on no first placement of weapons in outer space, by a recorded vote of 122 in favour to 32 against, with 21 abstentions, having first held separate recorded votes to retain three of its paragraphs. A number of delegations saw the draft as a viable effort, with China's representative regretting to note that the United States doctrine identifies outer space as a fighting domain. As such, he called on all States to work together to prevent the realm from becoming a battleground. Some delegates, including Zimbabwe's representative, said outer space must remain a zone of peace and stability.

Germany's representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that: "Russia has failed to reconcile its approach with the fact that it already possesses and continues to develop capabilities that can be regarded as weapons." Others, including Canada's representative, drew issue with a perceived lack of adequate definitions for what constitutes a weapon in outer space.

The Committee also approved, by separate recorded votes, the following draft resolutions and decisions related to outer space: prevention of an arms race; further practical measures for the prevention of an arms race; and transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities.

In its cluster on conventional weapons, the Committee approved a draft resolution on the implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, by a recorded vote of 163 in favour to none against, with 17 abstentions.

Some delegates expressed reservations, with several highlighting that landmines are a legitimate part of a nation's self-defence strategy. To eliminate landmines altogether, India's representative said, alternative technologies should be developed that can perform the same defensive function.

The Committee also approved the following draft resolutions and decisions: assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons and collecting them; implementation of the Convention on Cluster Munitions; illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects; and the Arms Trade Treaty.

Acting without a vote, the Committee approved the following drafts on: information on confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms; countering the threat posed by improvised explosive devices; problems arising from the accumulation of conventional ammunition stockpiles in surplus; and the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects.

Speaking in exercise of the right of reply were representatives of Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation.

The First Committee will reconvene at 10 a.m. on Monday, 9 November, to take action on all remaining draft resolutions and decisions.

Action on Draft Texts

Before voting on all five draft resolutions related to disarmament aspects of outer space, several delegations outlined their position, with many representatives voicing strong support for actions to ensure that realm remains free of weapons, with some expressing concerns about elements of several proposals. Kyrgyzstan's delegate, emphasizing that any agreement on this issue should be held in the consensus-based framework of the United Nations, said his delegation will vote in favour of related draft resolutions on this issue.

Among those speaking in opposition to the draft resolution "No first placement of weapons in outer space" (document [A/C.1/75/L.62](#)), the representative of the United States, also speaking on behalf of the United Kingdom and France, said he would vote against the draft, as the Russian Federation continues developing technologies that do not match its diplomatic rhetoric. Germany's representative, speaking on behalf of the European Union, said "L.62" failed to define what a weapon in outer space is, rendering the draft inefficient.

China's representative, whose delegation co-sponsored "L.62", said all Member States must give due regard to prevent outer space from becoming a new battleground, pointing out that the United States has identified the sphere as a new domain for fighting. Similarly, several representatives, including those from Mexico, Syria and Zimbabwe, voiced their delegations' support of the draft. Costa Rica's delegate said "L.62" represented an agreement to prevent a celestial arms race. However, the fact that a group of Member States are not going to be the first to place weapons in outer space is not a clear prohibition of such actions, as his delegation would have preferred. Also expressing his delegation's support for the draft, Pakistan's representative said preambular paragraph 5 reflects a noble goal that is valid in seeking a just world order. Likewise, he said his delegation supports the draft resolution "Prevention of an arms race in outer space" (document [A/C.1/75/L.3](#)).

While Cuba's representative said her delegation supports "L.62", she, among other delegates, said she could not vote in favour of the draft resolution "Reducing space threats through norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours" (document [A/C.1/75/L.45/Rev.1](#)). Falling outside the remit of the First Committee and more in line with the work of the Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization), "L.45/Rev.1" contains proposed norms or rules of responsible behaviours that are not sufficient to address threats, she said.

A number of delegates, including those from Algeria and Sri Lanka, voiced support for "L.45/Rev.1", pledging their commitment towards a weapon-free outer space. Meanwhile, Iran's representative said his delegation will vote against the "divisive" draft, which tries to set preconditions for the peaceful use of outer space. As international cooperation through technology transfers in relation to outer space is imperative to ensuring peace, he said, developed States are imposing restrictions that prevent developing States from benefiting from such activities.

Speaking on a point of order, the representative of the Russia Federation introduced a motion that the Committee has no competence to adopt "L.45/Rev.1", which has nothing to do with preventing an arms race in outer space. Moreover, the First Committee's work should not cover such issues as space debris, he said, emphasizing that these matters would be best addressed by the Fourth Committee.

Also delivering an explanation of vote were representatives of Belarus, Philippines, Egypt, Nicaragua and Venezuela.

The Committee then defeated the motion that the Committee has no competence to adopt draft "L.45/Rev.1", by a recorded vote of 15 in favour to 102 against, with 33 abstentions.

The Committee approved, by a recorded vote of 174 in favour to 2 against (Israel, United States), with no abstentions, the draft resolution "Prevention of an arms race in outer space" (document [A/C.1/75/L.3](#)).

By a recorded vote of 150 in favour to 12 against, with 8 abstentions (Angola, Armenia, Belarus, Bolivia, India, Israel, Nigeria, Palau), the Committee approved the draft resolution "Reducing space threats through norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours" (document [A/C.1/75/L.45/Rev.1](#)). Prior to approving the draft as a whole, it decided to retain three paragraphs.

The Committee, by a recorded vote of 138 in favour to 11 against, with 7 abstentions (Angola, Armenia, Belarus, Bolivia, Israel, South Africa, Togo), decided to retain preambular paragraph 12, by which the Assembly would stress that uses of these technologies and means for purposes inconsistent with the objectives of maintaining international stability and security can lead to the perception of threats and can have destabilizing effects on peace and security on Earth.

By a recorded vote of 135 in favour to 12 against, with 10 abstentions, it decided to retain preambular paragraph 14, by which the Assembly would be cognizant of the challenges of effectively verifying the capabilities of space objects, which can have both civilian and military applications.

The Committee, by a recorded vote of 140 in favour to 13 against, with 5 abstentions (Angola, Armenia, Belarus, Israel, Pakistan), decided to retain operative paragraph 5, by which the Assembly would encourage Member States to study existing and potential threats and security risks to space systems, and share their ideas on the further development and implementation of norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours.

The Committee approved the draft resolution “No first placement of weapons in outer space” (document [A/C.1/75/L.62](#)), by a recorded vote of 122 in favour to 32 against, with 21 abstentions, prior to which it approved the retention of three preambular paragraphs.

The Committee, by a recorded vote of 114 in favour to 47 against, with 7 abstentions (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Guinea, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Korea, Switzerland, Turkey), decided to retain preambular paragraph 5, by which the Assembly would reaffirm that practical measures should be examined and taken in the search for agreements to prevent an outer space arms race.

By a recorded vote of 116 in favour to 44 against, with 7 abstentions (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Liechtenstein, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Switzerland, Turkey), it decided to retain preambular paragraph 9, by which the Assembly would welcome the draft treaty on the prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space and of the threat or use of force against outer space objects, introduced by China and the Russian Federation at the Conference on Disarmament in 2008 and updated in 2014.

The Committee, by a recorded vote of 115 in favour to 31 against, with 21 abstentions, decided to retain preambular paragraph 11, by which the Assembly would stress the importance of the political statements made by a number of States that they would not be the first to place weapons in outer space.

By a recorded vote of 139 in favour to 2 against (Israel, United States), with 33 abstentions, the Committee approved the draft decision “Further practical measures for the prevention of an arms race in outer space” (document [A/C.1/75/L.63](#)).

The Committee then approved, by a recorded vote of 169 in favour to 2 against (Israel, United States), with 6 abstentions (Australia, Djibouti, Georgia, Palau, Ukraine, United Kingdom), the draft resolution “Transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities” (document [A/C.1/75/L.66](#)).

Prior to that approval, the Committee decided to retain preambular paragraph 9, by a recorded vote of 131 in favour to 5 against (Australia, Israel, Italy, United Kingdom, United States), with 26 abstentions. By its terms, the Assembly would express regret that, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and unresolved organizational problems within the Disarmament Commission, its working group tasked with preparing recommendations on the practical implementation of transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities with the goal of preventing an arms race was not in a position to conduct its work.

Several representatives took the floor to provide explanations of vote after action had been taken. Egypt's representative, speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, said he voted in favour of "L.45/Rev.1" as it seeks to develop rules and facilitate access to legally binding instruments to access outer space. While also voting in favour of the draft with a view to ensuring that all States work together to reduce space threats, Ecuador's delegate said the sponsors of "L.45/Rev.1" ran counter to efforts to revitalize the work of the General Assembly.

India's representative said that, as a major space-faring nation, he abstained on "L.45/Rev.1" because the draft failed to address preventing an arms race in outer space in a manner aligned with existing instruments. On "L.62", he said his delegation voted in favour of it in support of strengthening the international legal regime to prevent the weaponization of outer space.

Germany's representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, explained the group's shift from abstaining to voting against "L.62", saying Moscow's approach of no first placement of weapons does not strengthen trust and confidence-building among States. "Russia has also failed to reconcile its approach with the fact that it already possesses and continues to develop capabilities that can be regarded as weapons," she stated, pointing to Moscow's ground-based counter-space capabilities as a clear example. Among her delegation's reservations about "L.62", Canada's representative expressed concern over the absence of an adequate description of what constitutes a weapon in outer space and of a commitment to abstain from developing weapons to be used in that realm.

The representative of the Russian Federation regretted to note that, despite the obvious lack of correspondence regarding the United Kingdom's draft, the sponsors were able to mobilize supporters to have it included in the Committee's agenda. The draft seeks to erode the fundamental concepts of preventing an arms race in outer space and is an attempt to refocus Member States' efforts towards the development of amorphous rules in that realm. As such, his delegation voted against the draft.

While having voted in favour of "L.45/Rev.1", Pakistan's delegate said operative paragraph 5 should have recognized the need for the emergence of new norms, expressing hope that the draft complements existing initiatives.

Also explaining their delegations' position were representatives of Indonesia, Switzerland and Malaysia.

The Committee then turned to a range of drafts related to conventional weapons, hearing first from Mali's representative, who, on behalf of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), introduced the draft resolution "Assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons and collecting them" (document [A/C.1/75/L.32](#)).

Making a general statement, Colombia's representative said that the illicit trade in small arms continues to be a threat against peace and security to the extent that terrorist groups and transnational organized crime have access to them at a relatively low cost.

Several representatives delivered an explanation of vote. On the draft resolution "The Arms Trade Treaty" (document [A/C.1/75/L.53](#)), Cuba's representative said her delegation would refrain from voting on it, as the instrument was adopted by a premature vote when negotiations had not concluded. In terms of anti-personnel mines, she said that after six decades of hostility from the United States, Cuba cannot renounce the use of these weapons in accordance with its right to self-defence as established in the Charter of the United Nations. Egypt's representative said his delegation would abstain on "L.53", as the Arms Trade Treaty is selective and contains several shortcomings, due to some States' motivation to politicize the legitimate trade. Iran's representative, whose delegation also abstained on "L.53", said that, in the instrument, the commercial interests of certain countries have priority over the fundamentals of international law.

Pakistan's representative said his delegation would cast an abstention on the draft resolution "Implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction" (document [A/C.1/75/L.26](#)). Landmines play a role in meeting the military needs of many States, and, given the need to guard long borders, they are an integral part of Pakistan's defence, he said, adding that they will never become a source of civilian casualties.

Armenia's representative, noting Azerbaijan's recent large-scale military aggression against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, said the delegation joined consensus on the draft resolution "Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects" (document [A/C.1/75/L.61](#)). The representative of the Philippines, noting his delegation's co-sponsorship of four draft resolutions, expressed deep concern over the continued use of cluster munitions, adding that he strongly supports the draft resolutions "L.26" and "L.61".

The Committee approved the draft resolution "Implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their

Destruction” (document [A/C.1/75/L.26](#)), by a recorded vote of 163 in favour to none against, with 17 abstentions.

Acting without a vote, the Committee then approved the draft resolutions “Information on confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms” (document [A/C.1/75/L.28](#)), “Countering the threat posed by improvised explosive devices” (document [A/C.1/75/L.38](#)), as orally revised, and “Assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons and collecting them” (document [A/C.1/75/L.32](#)). Prior to acting on “L.32” as a whole, the Committee decided to retain preambular paragraph 16, by a recorded vote of 148 in favour to none against, with 18 abstentions, which would have the Assembly welcome the inclusion of these weapons in the Arms Trade Treaty’s scope.

The Committee approved the draft resolution “Implementation of the Convention on Cluster Munitions” (document [A/C.1/75/L.43](#)), as orally revised, by a recorded vote of 137 in favour to none against, with 39 abstentions, prior to which it decided, by a recorded vote of 144 in favour to none against, with 19 abstentions, to retain preambular paragraph 14, which would have the Assembly take note of the Secretary-General’s initiative Securing Our Common Future.

The Committee next approved the draft resolution “The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects” (document [A/C.1/75/L.44](#)). Prior to its consensus approval, the Committee decided, by a recorded vote of 167 in favour to 2 against (Israel, United States), with 1 abstention (Venezuela), to retain preambular paragraph 7, which would have the Assembly welcome the successful conclusion of the third United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, held in New York from 18 to 29 June 2018.

The Committee then approved the draft resolution “The Arms Trade Treaty” (document [A/C.1/75/L.53](#)), by a recorded vote of 150 in favour to 1 against (United States), with 28 abstentions, prior to which it decided to retain two paragraphs.

The Committee decided, by a recorded vote of 153 in favour to none against, with 17 abstentions, to retain preambular paragraph 9, which would have the Assembly recall the Secretary-General’s disarmament agenda, Securing Our Common Future.

It also decided, by a recorded vote of 130 in favour to 2 against (Israel, United States), with 31 abstentions, to retain operative paragraph 10, which would have the Assembly recognize the added value of the adoption in June 2018 of the report of the third United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action on Small Arms.

Acting without a vote, the Committee then approved the draft resolution “Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects” (document [A/C.1/75.L.61](#)) and the draft decision “Problems arising from the accumulation of conventional ammunition stockpiles in surplus” (document [A/C.1/75.L.67](#)).

Speaking in explanation of vote, Pakistan’s representative said his delegation joined consensus on “L.38”, sharing the international community’s concern about the use of improvised explosive devices by terrorists.

India’s representative said his delegation abstained on “L.53”, noting that New Delhi has established national export controls with respect to defence items. Abstaining on “L.26”, he said the availability of alternative technologies will facilitate the goal of eliminating anti-personnel mines.

Also on “L.26”, the representative of the [Republic of Korea](#) said that while Seoul supports the objectives of the Mine Ban Convention, it is not a party to the instrument, given the unique situation on the Korean Peninsula. Iran’s representative said the Mine Ban Convention focuses mainly on humanitarian concerns and does not taken into account the military requirements of many countries with long land borders. As such, his delegation abstained on the draft.

Egypt’s representative said his delegation abstained on “L.26” over reservations on the imbalanced nature of Mine Ban Convention, noting that Cairo has established a moratorium on exports. Abstaining on “L.43”, he said the Convention on Cluster Munitions is selective, imbalanced and was concluded outside the framework of the United Nations.

Referring to “L.43”, the representative of Cyprus said her delegation signed the Convention on Cluster Munitions in 2009, with the ratification process still ongoing due to the abnormal security situation on the island.

Also delivering explanations of vote were representatives of Mexico, Argentina, Ecuador, United States, Brazil and the Russian Federation.

Right of Reply

The representative of [Azerbaijan](#), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said her delegation was acting in full compliance with international law, including humanitarian law, in countering Armenian forces within occupied territories. Armenia is misusing the Committee to attempt to cover up its own attacks on civilian populations, she said.

The representative of the [Russian Federation](#) said a number of Western delegations were attempting to discredit Moscow’s efforts to prevent an arms race in outer space. Unlike the space

doctrines of France and the United States, the Russian Federation is prioritizing efforts to prevent the weaponization of the realm.

 **For information media. Not an official record.**