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Topic 9: Norms, rules and principles relating to international cooperation, including with respect to space surveillance and tracking and space situational awareness

Open-Ended Working Group on reducing space threats through norms, rules, and principles of responsible behaviours

Geneva, Switzerland

Statement by Dr. Brian Weeden, Director of Program Planning, Secure World Foundation

Thank you, Mr. Chair. My name is Dr. Brian Weeden and I'm the Director of Program Planning for Secure World Foundation, a private operating foundation dedicated to the secure and sustainable use of outer space for the benefit of all peoples of the Earth.

It is my honor to have the chance to address this very important meeting and in particular the topic of how space situational awareness can impact norms, rules, and principles of responsible behaviours in space.

My organization has been working for several years to bring together governments, satellite operators, academia, and other stakeholders to discuss ways to improve sharing of SSA information between different space actors and increase the trust and reliability of such data.

Relevant to the discussions this week, we recently started focusing on how SSA capabilities might be used for monitoring behaviors in space and verifying compliance with current and future legally-binding agreements. We feel this is critical to the success of establishing and upholding norms, principles, and rules in space. Monitoring and verification will enable countries to ensure that others are following the norms or rules, build confidence in these frameworks, and help prevent misperceptions and mistakes that could lead to conflict.

However, our examination so far has shown that much more work is needed to refine this concept. While useful in many regards, SSA capabilities are limited in terms of what kinds of threats can be detected, monitored, and attributed, and there are significant challenges still in interpreting the meaning of the technical data.

For example, SSA capabilities can be used to verify certain threats to space systems in orbit, such as destructive anti-satellite (ASAT) tests and uncoordinated close approaches, but are less helpful in verifying threats that are less visible and not as easy to attribute to a specific actor,

such as cyberattacks and electronic warfare. SSA in general can help both in identifying patterns of life for normal space activities and when space objects diverge from those normal patterns, as well as verifying that behaviors agreed to as part of legally-binding arms control agreements are being followed.

Other challenges also exist. The specific type and sources of SSA data necessary to verify an agreement will largely depend the type and details of said agreement. We will need sources of SSA data that can be validated and trusted by multiple parties, likely with differing levels of technology. These, and other points, are expanded on in a written submission we have provided to this body.

Going forward, we encourage States and civil society to explore these issues further and help develop answers to these questions. Doing so will help create a monitoring and verification regime that can enable future voluntary and legally-binding agreements that help make space safer and more secure for all space actors.

Mr. Chair, thank you for your time.