

STATEMENT OF THE CHAIR OF  
THE COMMITTEE ON THE PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE

Joint Panel Discussion of the First and Fourth Committees of the General Assembly at its  
Seventy-seventh Session

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Distinguished Delegates,

It is an honour for me to address the joint panel discussion of the First and Fourth Committees on possible challenges to space security and sustainability in my capacity as Chair of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS), and to provide an orientation to the work of the Committee and its subsidiary bodies.

The United Nations has been at the centre of international cooperation in space activities since the beginning of the space age. COPUOS came into being as a result of the recognition by the General Assembly, in its resolution 1348 (XIII) in 1958, of the importance of using outer space for peaceful purposes and of the need to promote international cooperation in the conduct of space activities.

Already in 1959, COPUOS was established as a permanent body under the General Assembly. Resolution 1472 (XIV) reaffirmed the role of the Committee and requested the Committee to review international co-operation; study space-related activities that could be undertaken under United Nations auspices; encourage and assist with national space research programmes; and study legal problems which may arise from the exploration of outer space.

Because of its mandate and positioning at the centre of global governance, the Committee played a key role in the organization of the three UNISPACE conferences held to date, at which the practical benefits of space science and technology and their applications were examined, with special emphasis on the needs of developing countries and the contributions of space science and technology and their applications in support of global and regional development agendas and in gaining benefits for society at large.

Each of the UNISPACE conferences were held in a different context owing to the continuous growth in space activities and their diversification, as well as the emergence of new actors. Nonetheless, the mandate of the Committee remained flexible enough to ensure progress in implementing the recommendations of the UNISPACE conferences while also gradually strengthening the mandates of the Committee and its Scientific and Technical Subcommittee and Legal Subcommittee, as well as the Office for Outer Space Affairs.

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The Committee and its Subcommittees are positioned as global platforms for international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space and dialogue among major spacefaring nations and emerging space nations. This has been reaffirmed by the fact that the number of States that have become members of the Committee has increased from the initial 24 States at the establishment of the Committee as a permanent body in 1959 to the current 100 States members of the Committee.

Owing to its unique mandate and position at the centre of international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space, and the global governance of outer space activities, consistent with international law, the Committee and its Legal Subcommittee and Scientific and Technical Subcommittee have a distinguished historical record in the establishment and further development of the United Nations legal instruments governing outer space activities.

The five United Nations treaties on outer space are the Outer Space Treaty, the Rescue and Return Agreement, the Liability Convention, the Registration Convention, and the Moon Agreement. Other instruments include the non-legally binding declaration of legal principles of 1963, which was the precursor to the Outer Space Treaty, and the four sets of Principles on outer space activities.

Moreover, the Space debris Mitigation Guidelines of the Committee, the Safety Framework on Nuclear Power Sources Application, and the Guidelines for the Long-term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities of the Committee, represent important instruments of non-legally binding nature. There are also important resolutions on the concept of the “launching state”, registration practice, and national space legislation, supporting States in the implementation of their rights and obligations under the treaties on outer space.

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Over those more than 60 years of governance and diplomacy in the peaceful uses of outer space, space activities of States, international intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental entities have increased, and space science and technology and their applications today are contributing immeasurably to sustainable development.

The Committee and its Subcommittees, through their agendas and the work of working groups and expert groups, constantly monitor the advances in space technology and the rapidly evolving space agenda with a view to developing new mechanisms reflective of the new complexities of space activities.

To address these developments, the Committee and its Subcommittees continue to foster multilateralism and common grounds in areas including the long-term sustainability of outer space activities, space debris mitigation and remediation measures, space exploration, utilization of space resources, space traffic management, and a range of items addressing the importance of space science and technology applications to meet the Sustainable Development Goals, and so forth.

Deliberations are being undertaken within several working groups under multi-year work plans, such as those on the use of nuclear power sources in outer space, long-term sustainability of outer space activities, status and application of the five United Nations treaties on outer space; definition and delimitation of outer space; and on legal aspects of space resource activities.

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To give a concrete example – over the years, the Committee has considered different aspects of the long-term sustainability of outer space activities. In 2010 the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee added an agenda item on the topic to its agenda. Under this item, and through its dedicated Working Group with subsidiary expert groups, Committee members engaged in in-depth debates and negotiations, covering such critically important topics as space debris, space situational awareness, space weather and regulatory regimes.

In 2019, COPUOS adopted the Guidelines for the Long-term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities. The Guidelines, while voluntary in nature, represent an invaluable political consensus. They comprise a compendium of internationally recognized measures for, and commitments to, ensuring the long-term sustainability of outer space activities and, in particular, enhancing the safety of space operations.

The Committee serves as the principal forum for continued institutionalized dialogue on issues related to the implementation and review of the Guidelines, and a new Working Group on the Long-term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities is now working to identify and study challenges and consider possible new guidelines; share experiences, practices and lessons learned from voluntary national implementation of the adopted Guidelines; and raise awareness and build capacity.

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Last year COPUOS further reaffirmed its role as a unique platform for advancing multilateralism in outer space activities as it submitted to the United Nations General Assembly at its 76<sup>th</sup> session the “Space2030” Agenda and implementation plan, as a forward-looking strategy for reaffirming and strengthening the contribution of space activities and space tools to the achievement of global agendas, addressing long-term sustainable development concerns of humankind.

The “Space2030” Agenda, adopted by the General Assembly with consensus and available in resolution 76/3, also importantly contributes to charting the future contribution of COPUOS to the framework for the global governance of outer space activities. The Agenda demonstrates the commitment of Member States of the United Nations to promoting the implementation of the United Nations treaties on outer space, as well as the implementation of related principles and General Assembly resolutions; to ensuring the long-term sustainability of outer space activities and the preservation of the space environment for peaceful uses.

In the “Space2030” Agenda, Member States address changes in the undertaking of outer space activities at a time when new technologies have emerged and when an increasing number of participants, representing both governmental agencies and non-governmental entities, including industry and the private sector, are becoming involved in ventures to explore and use outer space and carry out space activities.

These commitments also include ensuring that the Committee, and its Subcommittees, supported by the Office for Outer Space Affairs, continue, as appropriate, to respond to such changes, in their role as unique platforms for international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space.

Distinguished Delegates,

I thank you for your attention.

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