

Sixty-fourth session of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space
Vienna, 25 August – 3 September 2021

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Mr. Chair, Distinguished Delegates,

I welcome the opportunity to address the sixty-fourth session of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space on the work of the Office for Outer Space Affairs.

Mr. Chair, at the outset, allow me to assure you and the Bureau of my and my team commitments to assist you in running the meetings. We have been working hard to allow this session to go ahead despite the restrictions posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. I hope it is also a sign that we are steadily moving towards normality in our intergovernmental body.

Mr. Chair, Distinguished Delegates,

Allow me to join you in welcoming the Dominican Republic, Rwanda and Singapore as members of the Committee. Welcome also to the Moon Village Association as a new observer.

Additionally, as of now, we have received applications for Committee membership from Angola, Bangladesh, Panama and Slovenia, as well as applications for observer status from the International Institute for the Unification of Private Law (UNIDROIT), the Open Lunar Foundation and the Square Kilometre Array Observatory.

I am confident that with the broadening awareness of the work of COPUOS and of the Office, the continued interest in joining the work of the Committee and the increasing recognition of the role space plays in the daily lives of people around the world, the membership of the Committee will shortly surpass one hundred States, demonstrating the truly strong and inclusive nature of this multilateral body.

Mr. Chair, Distinguished Delegates,

Promoting the benefits of outer space for sustainable development is at the heart of this Committee and the Office work, and UNOOSA looks forward to doing all we can to advance cooperation in this area, both as Secretariat to the Committee and more generally as the United Nations office responsible for outer space affairs in the UN Secretariat.

The COVID-19 situation in 2020 and 2021 lead the Office to maximize its capacity in using virtual platforms and alternative outreach mechanisms. The demand for services UNOOSA provides to Member States continues to expand. From legal advisory services, to guidance on space object registration or hands-on capacity building through several cross-cutting programmatic activities either under our regular budget or with voluntary contributions in close partnership with Member States and other actors.

In this context, we are increasingly building up several activities with partners, including the Space Law for New Space Actors Project, the Access to Space for All initiative, the Space Economy Initiative, the Promoting Space Sustainability Project, and the space debris infographics and podcasts. The well-established World Space Forum plays an important role in fostering dialogue among our stakeholders.

Through results-based management approach to capacity-building, UNOOSA has been able to make a real difference. And often, we are not alone. In strong partnerships with a variety of stakeholders, the Office has been successful in building and sustaining new endeavours, reducing the space divide and considerably reinforcing international cooperation, in particular for the benefit of developing countries.

With its specific and broad mandate to deal with the full spectrum of space activities, including science, technology, policy and law, UNOOSA enables, at their requests, communities from all over the world, with special focus on non-space faring and emerging space-faring nations, to use and benefit from space technologies and applications, with the support of space-faring nations and different stakeholders.

More countries than ever are establishing new space agencies and offices, and hundreds of start-ups are entering the market. Yet, millions of people lack access to even basic benefits of space technologies. In this context, UNOOSA strives to bring the benefits of space to everyone, everywhere. In providing access to space for all, we facilitated the placement in orbit of a satellite from Guatemala in 2020 and a satellite from Mauritius in June this year, bringing to three the number of countries that, since 2018, launched a satellite in orbit for the first time. Thanks to all who contributed to make the difference, supporting the Office in this endeavour.

In this regard, I am pleased to note that this year we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Office's Programme on Space Applications, which was established in 1971. A commemorative short video will be screened immediately after my statement. The aim is to give a perspective on the broad and important role of the Programme and its evolution over those past 50 years.

Mr. Chair, Distinguished Delegates,

This increasing attention and interest in space affairs is also mirrored internally within the UN system. In this context, last year saw UNOOSA's responsibilities become even more closely linked to the work of the UN Secretary-General with the promulgation of ST/SGB/2020/1 on 13 January 2020. This represents the foundation of the new Office for Outer Space Affairs, with this organizational structure and its role within the UN system well spelled out. The Office's Director is fully accountable to the Secretary-General and serves as the SG's senior adviser on outer space affairs.

The SGB determines the future of UNOOSA as the gateway to space in the United Nations system and provides the administrative setting for our continued role as a capacity-builder, convener, and a facilitator of international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space. Our collective efforts are mapped to align with the internationally agreed frameworks, especially responsive to the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The SGB also underlines the leading role of the Office in the work of the Inter-Agency Meeting on Outer Space Activities (UN-Space) on the examination of how space science and technology and their applications could contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. In this capacity, the Office has prepared, in 2020, the report of the Secretary-General on the coordination of space-related activities within the United Nations system - focused on megatrends and realization of the SDGs (A/AC.105/1230) on the basis of submissions received from 11 UN entities. The report is before the Committee at its present session for consideration.

The Office continues to expand its cooperation with other United Nations entities. A list of activities developed together with other UN entities can be found in the annex.

Mr. Chair, Distinguished Delegates,

I am pleased to announce that the UNOOSA 2020 Annual Report has been published and the online version is also available on the UNOOSA website. The report contains the highlight of activities carried out by the Office in the implementation of the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space Programme. More detailed information on UNOOSA activities is also provided in the annex to this statement.

Allow me to focus on some highlights in terms of activities to be conducted by the Office in the upcoming few months.

Right after this session of the Committee, the UN/Austria Symposium will take place. The Office has prepared an Independent Dialogue on Space Applications for Food Systems together with other UN entities, to take place during the Symposium on 9 September 2021 and to become part of the approximately 1,400 such online events linked to the UN Food Systems Summit taking place later this year.

At the end of September, the Office will host in Vienna the 15th Annual meeting of ICG which continues to play a pivotal role in multilateralism and interoperability of systems. And soon after, the mandated Dark and Quiet Skies conference will take place, to address, as indicated by the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee, issues related to pollution and protection of the sky. Our presence at COP26 YOUTH is also confirmed and this allows me to recall that the space for your competition this year was devoted to climate change, one of the most difficult challenges we are facing as humanity and we announced the three winners in June. The expert meeting on space4women was supposed to take place in Brazil, but the world COVID-19 situation brought us in agreement with the government of Brazil and the government of UAE to have the meeting in Dubai, during the EXPO space week, at the Brazilian pavilion. This event will be immediately followed at IAC by the 28th UN/IAF workshop on space technology for socio-economic benefits, this year devoted to space exploration. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all Member States which have been supportive of our activities and together with us, are striving to find solutions and creatively adapt, aiming at increasing synergies, reducing costs and maximizing results.

Last but not least, in December this year, our annual World Space Forum will take place here in Vienna in collaboration with the Austrian government focusing on climate change. The IPCC report just issued contains alarming indicators and this can only convince us even more that we do need to act, now. I hope that in the next coming weeks a dialogue can start with and within Member States to see how space can support this effort to keep global warming up to 1.5 C by 2030, with respect to the parameters before the industrial revolution, so to be able to reach net zero by 2050.

Mr. Chair, Distinguished Delegates,

In closing, I wish to assure you that UNOOSA is committed to maintaining a very high standard of service delivery and providing dedicated support to the Committee. I hope you will find the video on the 50th anniversary of the Programme on Space Applications interesting. I wish all delegations a successful sixty-fourth session of the Committee. Thank you for your attention and enjoy.