



Ministry of Economic Affairs
and Employment of Finland

Finland's Statement in the 60th session of the Legal Subcommittee of the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space Vienna, 31 May – 11 June 2021

Agenda Item 10 – General Exchange of Information and Views on Legal Mechanisms Relating to Space Debris Mitigation and Remediation Measures, Taking into Account the Work of the STSC

Thank you Madame Chair,

Under this agenda item, Finland would like to inform the Legal Subcommittee about its national legal mechanisms regarding space debris, and state its commitment to the rules based, safe, sustainable, and peaceful use of outer space.

Madame Chair, distinguished Delegates,

We note with satisfaction that space debris mitigation is becoming a recurrent theme in national space laws. Both space governance through non-legally binding instruments and the increasing number of national space legislation are representing a current trend in the development of space law. Coupled with the NewSpace reality, the increased number of actors and objects, it means that the application, implementation, and enforcement of space debris mitigation measures at national level are in a key position to ensure the protection of the outer space environment, as well as the long-term sustainability of outer space activities, as already mentioned by many delegations.

Today, the non-legally binding guidelines and standards represent, in our opinion, the best way forward for space debris mitigation. Together with other international instruments, they support the underlying objectives of protection of the outer space environment, the Earth, and the atmosphere, as well as risk limitation and long-term sustainability of outer space activities. We however note that effective implementation of the measures nationally require resources, both from technical and regulatory. Thus, coordination and information sharing, at all levels, and amongst all the actors, can work to ensure overcoming issues causing uncertainty and any fragmentation in the regulation of space activities, nationally and internationally, to safeguard the proper functioning of space law and the underlying objectives. Notwithstanding, we would again restate our belief in the rules based international system. We note that having binding guidance at international level for the conduct of sustainable space activities could bring predictability, create conditions for tackling global problems in a coherent manner, and as such would act to ensure a uniform development of space law.

Madame Chair,

One of the objectives of the national space law, the Act on Space Activities, which entered into force in 2018, is to stress the importance of the sustainable use of outer space and the mitigation of space debris. Under the Act and the complementing Decree, avoidance of unnecessary environmental harm and space debris is one of the conditions for authorisation of space activities, which is further reinforced by a specific article on environmental protection. According to the Act, the operator should plan, and carry out its space activities in accordance with recognised international guidelines for space debris mitigation. More specifically, the operator should seek to ensure that there is no generation of space debris during the nominal operations, and to strive to move the space object from its orbit to a less crowded orbit, or into the Earth's atmosphere, at least within 25 years after it has completed its mission. According to the Act, there is also a general obligation to conduct space activities in an environmentally sustainable way. For this purpose, the operator is required to make a prior environmental impact assessment of its space activities, and report on those yearly.

With such a topical matter of space debris mitigation, Finland is monitoring development of international best practices and space debris mitigation instruments, and has implemented a continuous review cycle to ensure that the legislation continues to reflect these in a meaningful and effective manner. Finland is also getting more active in the domain of Space Situational Awareness (SSA), which we understand to include space weather, space surveillance and tracking, as well as near earth objects. We are currently mapping our

national capabilities and the possibilities in international cooperation. We have set up a special division dedicated to SSA under the Finnish National Space Committee, which is tasked to draft a national SSA strategy as well as the setting up a national governance, and the identifying the required resources in support.

Madame Chair, distinguished delegates,

In this context, we also wish to recall the 21 guidelines on long-term sustainability adopted by the Committee in 2019. This broad set of diverse guidelines combats the concerns of intergenerational sustainability as well as the safety of spaceflight. These guidelines need to be implemented at national level to achieve their objective in steering the behaviour of the actors. In Finland, we have started to analyse the guidelines with a view to see which ones have already been implemented, and which need further work at national and international level. For this purpose, the Finnish delegation together with the Swiss delegation organized a workshop in order to exchange views with our European colleagues, ESA and the EU on this important topic. We wish to actively engage in international discussion to support the development of the norms contained in the instrument from the legal and regulatory perspective.

Finally, we would like to thank ESA for the organisation of the eighth Conference on Space Debris organised in April 2021. These conferences, which are organised every four years, are the largest gatherings to discuss various aspects of space debris research, including standardization, policy, regulation, and legal issues. Such interdisciplinary approach is necessary to reach the goal of safe, sustainable and intergenerational use of outer space.

Thank you Madame Chair, and thank you distinguished Delegates for your kind attention.

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