

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIR

Scientific and Technical Subcommittee
Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space

Fifty-eighth Session
Vienna, 19-30 April 2021

Distinguished Delegates and Representatives,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to the fifty-eighth session of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. It is for me an honour to continue serving as Chair of the Subcommittee for the period 2020-2021. I would like to express my deep appreciation to the Director of the Office for Outer Space Affairs, Simonetta Di Pippo, and her dedicated Team for outstanding preparations made for this session under these unprecedented circumstances.

We have successfully held the fifty-seventh session of the Subcommittee in February last year, shortly before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the decisions of the Subcommittee have been endorsed in October 2020 by the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space via written procedure and subsequently by the 75th session of the General Assembly of the United Nations. Through virtual informal consultations and written decision-making procedures, we have proactively adapted our processes and the organisation of our work in order to overcome the conditions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and to avoid any disruption to the work of the Subcommittee.

Distinguished Delegates,

Last week on 12 April 2021, we celebrated the UN declared International Day of Human Space Flight by commemorating the 60th anniversary of Yuri Gagarin's first flight.

Space activities are thriving, with the emergence of new technologies and new actors at an unprecedented rate. Space actors have become more diverse and plural than ever before. This should be taken as an encouraging sign that space applications may soon benefit more and more people around the globe. It should also encourage us in our efforts in promoting international cooperation and enhanced use of space technologies for socioeconomic development and for addressing global challenges. At the same time, the increased participation in space activities, including with an increasing role of the private sector, is raising emerging challenges in outer space activities.

For the past year, we have been dealing with the impact of the pandemic, which caused disruptions of unprecedented magnitude in contemporary history to many sectors. Still, despite the pandemic, space activities are developing steadily. For example, we have witnessed remarkable missions launched to Mars by a range of space nations, including China, United Arab Emirates and the United States, as well as a Solar orbiting mission launched by the European Space Agency. We also continued to witness international cooperation at the International Space Station with successful human flights launches by the Russian Federation and the first private launch by SpaceX.

We are also witnessing a significant increase in the number of objects launched into space. In 2020, just under 1,300 satellites and other space objects were registered with the Secretary-General, and an additional 600 space objects have been registered so far in 2021. This marks a sharp increase in registration, and I commend the Office for Outer Space Affairs in efficiently maintaining the Register on Objects launched into Outer Space against this evolution in space object registration.

Furthermore, the contribution that outer space activities are making to the attainment of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda is immense, not least considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on society, and it is important to continue supporting the peaceful pursuit of common goals in space that have illustrated the very best of what humankind can achieve together. Space science, satellite data, technology and applications, space exploration and research are not only substantive contributors to development, but are also long-term drivers for innovation, fostering jobs, strengthening international cooperation among nations, and creating new tools and opportunities for addressing global challenges. While at the present time not all States have the capacity to join in space exploration, science and research, or the development of space technology, it should be our aim to share the benefits of these activities, space science and technology in achieving our common commitments under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Distinguished Delegates,

In 2011, the Committee set itself the goal to enhance the long-term sustainability of outer space activities. In 2019, the Committee adopted the preamble and 21 guidelines for the long-term sustainability of outer space activities, as contained in Annex II to its report, and decided to establish a new working group under a five-year work-plan under the new agenda item on the long-term sustainability of outer space activities of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee.

I would like to thank the delegation of South Africa, and in particular Pontsho Maruping, for having accepted last year to facilitate informal consultations on the matter of electing the bureau of this new working group, including a series of five intersessional informal consultations since last December. I am confident that the new working group will be instrumental in assisting States and international intergovernmental organizations to voluntarily take measures to enhance the long-term sustainability of outer space activities and to ensure that the outer space environment is preserved and protected to the maximum extent possible for exploration and use by future generations.

Distinguished Delegates,

The Subcommittee has a special and important task to consider many areas of space science and technology and their applications through working groups and other platforms. The Working Group on the Use of Nuclear Power Sources in Outer Space, the Working Group of the Whole of the Subcommittee and the Working Group on Space and Global Health will continue their substantive consideration at this session. The dedicated Expert Group on Space Weather will continue its work. I also note with appreciation the continued work carried out by the three international bodies whose establishment was facilitated by the Subcommittee, namely the International Committee on Global Navigation Satellite Systems (ICG), the Space Mission Planning Advisory Group (SMPAG) and the International Asteroid Warning Network (IAWN). I look forward to hearing their respective reports to the Subcommittee.

As we can see, we have ahead of us a session with a tight schedule and an unprecedented format. With the extraordinary organization of this session we demonstrate that we are able to forward our agenda despite the COVID-19 pandemic. But rising challenges are ahead of us, not behind. We

will have to be agile by adjusting to these current realities, and, at the same time, to uphold the strength of our Subcommittee and to maintain its efficiency. The Subcommittee has a unique potential for fostering dialogue and cooperation at global multilateral level. We shall collectively make the best of it. I look forward to a highly productive session and I am committed, as the Chair of the Subcommittee, to work with all of you to ensure that we continue to make measurable progress in our work. I wish you all a successful and productive session. Thank you for your attention!
