

Agenda Item – 4: General Exchange of Views

Mr. Chair and distinguished Delegates,

At the outset, the Indian delegation would like to join the other delegations in congratulating you on assuming the Chair of this Session of the Legal Sub Committee of COPUOS. We place on record our sincere appreciation to the UNOOSA team led by Ms. Aarti Holla-Maini for efficient organization of COPUOS and its sub-committee sessions and excellent preparations made for the current session.

Mr. Chair,

India is a party to all the major international treaties/regulations related to outer space, including Outer Space Treaty, the Rescue Agreement, the Liability Convention and the Registration Convention. India also implements the outer space related non-legally binding instruments including the UN Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines.

To cite a recent example, the PSLV C58 mission, launched on January 1st, 2024, practically left zero debris in orbit. After completing the primary mission of injecting all satellites into their desired orbits, the terminal stage of PSLV was transformed into a 3-axis stabilized platform, the POEM-3. The stage was passivated to remove residual propellants in order to minimize any accidental break-up risks and was de-orbited from 650 km to 350 km, which facilitated its early re-entry on March 21st, 2024 over the North Pacific Ocean.

Prior to that, India also undertook measures towards effecting the uncontrolled atmospheric re-entry of Cartosat-2, which was earlier expected to take about 30 years to naturally de-orbit. This was done by lowering the spacecraft's perigee using leftover fuel to comply with international guidelines on space debris mitigation, thus reducing collision risks and ensuring safe end-of-life disposal. The spacecraft reentered over the Indian Ocean on February 14, 2024, meeting its demise during atmospheric reentry.

India implements a number of Transparency and Confidence Building Measures, including registration of space objects, prelaunch notifications, and numerous international cooperation activities. India is also committed to implement the adopted guidelines on Long-term Sustainability of outer space activities to the extent possible, and has shared its experiences of implementing these guidelines in its space operations. India is hosting the annual IADC meeting in 2024.

Mr. Chair,

India initiated a major space reform in 2020 to enable participation of private sector in space activities. A regulatory mechanism for authorization and monitoring of space activities by non-governmental entities has been put in place, through the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre (IN-SPACe), which ensures authorization of space activities being undertaken.

The recently released Indian Space Policy 2023 addresses the overarching requirements for safe and sustainable operations. IN-SPACe engages with emerging space

actors to ensure authorization of space activities, of which assessment of compliance with space debris mitigation guidelines is an integral part.

Mr. Chair,

As need for exploitation and utilization of space resources appears inevitable and technological advancements make it more and more feasible, there is urgent need to put in place, an appropriate regulatory framework for regulation of space resources. The Legal Sub-Committee of COPUOS is the appropriate forum for this exercise. It is encouraging to see the steady progress being made by the working Group on legal aspects of space resource activities. The Indian delegation looks forward to actively engage in the work of the working group.

India believes that technological benefits offered by space based applications hold great potential for addressing the problems faced by humankind. Recent years have witnessed a renewed interest across the globe in the utilization of outer space. The private entities are an important component of this revival, which has opened more and more avenues for commercial utilization of space based products and services. However, it has also resulted in rapid increase in proliferation of space objects, bringing forth questions of the safety of space operations. It is crucial to ensure and enhance the long-term sustainability of outer space activities so that the benefits of space technology are preserved for the future generations. The international legal framework, therefore, needs to be strengthened to enhance the safety and sustainability of space for all space users.

Mr. Chair,

The Legal Sub-committee should continue to hold exchange of views on legal mechanisms relating to the space debris mitigation and remediation measures, space traffic management and application of international laws to small satellites, as these factors are crucial for sustainable space operations. Indian delegation also recognizes the role played by other instruments like TCBMs, which offer a good starting point towards arriving at future multilateral legally binding mechanisms. These best practices also pave way for the member states that are working on national space legislation to incorporate these aspects suitably in the same.

The rapid pace of emergence of newer space technologies necessitates that the outer space legal regime, should closely monitor the scientific and technical developments and ponder on the legal challenges they may pose. A greater synergy with Scientific and Technical Sub-Committee would be useful in effectively addressing the legal aspects of challenges such as space debris mitigation and space traffic management.

Mr. Chair,

India reiterates its commitment to continue working with other nations, to pursue shared interests towards legally binding instruments as well as transparency and confidence building measures, complementary to them, with a view to ensuring the safety of all space-based assets and activities.

Thank you, Mr. Chair and distinguished delegates for your kind attention.