

*Sixty-third session of the Legal Subcommittee
of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space
Vienna, (15-26 April 2024)*

**STATEMENT BY THE
DIRECTOR
UNITED NATIONS OFFICE FOR OUTER SPACE AFFAIRS (UNOOSA)**

Chair, Distinguished Delegates,

It is my distinct honour to welcome and address you at this 63rd session of the Legal Subcommittee in my capacity as the Director of UNOOSA. I would like to thank the outgoing Chair of the Legal Subcommittee, Ms Nomfuneko Majaja (South Africa) and welcome the incoming Chair, Santiago Ripol Carulla (Spain).

It has already been half a year since I, together with my dear colleague Driss El Hadani, Deputy Director and Scientific Adviser, assumed our roles as the new leadership team of UNOOSA. I would like to assure you of our strong commitment to driving positive change across the 5 key pillars of the UNOOSA strategy that we presented to you in January, and in engaging with you, the Member States, in a constructive way to advance the multilateral dialogue through the Committee and deliver much needed results on key issues that are before this unique multilateral intergovernmental body.

Chair, Distinguished Delegates,

I firmly believe that the need to progress on the agenda before you is urgent. The innumerable space activities that we are witnessing today are built on Treaties and soft law that are the outcomes of the hard work of the Committee and this Legal Subcommittee.

Given the pace at which space activities are accelerating, the role of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) and this Subcommittee has never been as critical as it is today and we need you, the Member States, to collaboratively and with purpose, forge the path ahead on space governance.

Almost a year ago now, with a Policy Brief “For All Humanity – The Future of Outer Space Governance”, the UN Secretary-General issued a call to action for global governance solutions to effectively address space traffic coordination, space debris, and space resources. All these three areas have a central role in the agenda of this Legal Subcommittee, and I am looking forward to seeing your progress towards the development of practical solutions over the next two weeks.

Most people have no idea that space is today a vital component of our daily lives, but on the other hand, many people *have* heard of space debris. The orbital environment has never been as congested as it is today. Humankind has been launching satellites since 1957 and today while we *celebrate* the space economy with over 9,900 active satellites orbiting our Earth, we cannot ignore the fact that that number is dwarfed by the numbers of non-functional

objects in space: more than 24,000 larger than 10 cm, 1 million smaller than 10 cm, and likely more than 130 million smaller than 1 cm.

Space debris and orbital congestion are casting a shadow on the sustainable uses of space, and the world looks to COPUOS for answers to these problems, so that we can continue to deliver the benefits of space for all humanity. Just like with climate change, a mixture of rules and tools are required to ensure continued access to space for all and to mitigate the risks posed by space debris and increasing orbital congestion.

At this session you, the member States, will continue to exchange views on both legal aspects of space traffic management and legal mechanisms relating to space debris mitigation and remediation measures. All eyes are on you, the experts in Vienna. So respectfully, I urge you to keep the Vienna Spirit alive throughout your deliberations in these two weeks and really make your best efforts to advance discussions and find consensus on concrete steps to tackle these critical matters. We know that it can be done, building on the solid foundations provided by the Long-Term Sustainability Guidelines and I am convinced that there is no better forum than this Subcommittee for advancing on these matters. It is through your actions over the coming weeks, that we can and must continue to reaffirm the key role of COPUOS within the UN system as the right venue to drive progress on space governance.

Looking to the future, many see significant potential in resources to be found on celestial bodies such as the Moon, planets, and asteroids. However, without agreed international principles governing space resource activities, there is a real risk of conflict, of environmental degradation, and of increased inequalities in perhaps the not-too-distant future given how fast we have seen technology advancing.

At this session you, the member States, will continue to exchange views on potential legal models for the governance of these activities through the meetings of the Working Group on the Legal Aspects of Space Resource Activities. I was honoured to moderate two panels at the Expert meeting hosted so well by Luxembourg last month, and I am looking forward to a productive International Conference taking place in this room in a few hours' time. These are excellent and valuable developments, and I am hopeful that the Working Group will start discussing an initial set of principles to ensure these activities 'are conducted in accordance with international law and in a safe, sustainable, rational and peaceful manner'.

But there is yet more. In times when a growing number of States intend to establish permanent settlements on a few key locations on the Moon, and an even larger number of private actors set their sights on our one natural satellite for commercial opportunities, you are called upon to start considering a series of priority issues that are central to enable the peaceful, prosperous, and cooperative exploration of celestial bodies.

At this session you will also continue informal consultations on a proposal for an Action Team on Lunar Activities Consultation - ATLAC, that was well-received by the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee in February. With your support, this can mark the beginning of a journey to create a dedicated forum to enhance safety and preserve the integrity of the lunar environment and its heritage sites, ensuring that the moon remains a domain for all humanity.

UNOOSA is ready to support this process as deemed appropriate by the Member States. On 18 June, the day before our Plenary meeting, we are organising a UN Conference

on Sustainable Lunar Activities here in Vienna. The Conference aims to foster better understanding of the commonalities within the different approaches of key actors and identify potential avenues for global coordination. It is aimed at supporting the multilateral dialogue on lunar governance and hearing also from the non-governmental sector. I sincerely hope you will all attend.

Progress in all these areas requires enhanced information-sharing. Transparency and open communication build trust, enable coordination, and increase cooperation. At this session you will exchange views on information sharing under Article XI of the Outer Space Treaty through the meetings of the Working Group on the Status and Application of the Five United Nations Treaties. As this topic holds transversal importance for the safety and sustainability of ALL space activities, I hope your discussions will bear positive fruits for streamlining and enhancing implementation of this key provision of the Outer Space Treaty, potentially through dedicated tools and practices as you, the Member States, will deem relevant and appropriate.

Chair, Distinguished Delegates,

UNOOSA continues to discharge the substantive responsibilities of the Secretary-General under the treaties and principles on outer space. Allow me to update you briefly on the status of registrations of space objects.

With regard to the United Nations Register of Objects Launched into Outer Space, in 2023, 2,587 functional and 49 non-functional space objects were registered by 32 States and one organization. Also, in 2023, 585 space object re-entry notifications and additional information for 22 space objects were received from 15 States. In 2024, UNOOSA has so far received registrations for another 535 space objects from 18 States. We thank the States of registry for their assistance in the timely resolution of related issues.

UNOOSA is also pleased to inform delegates that, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 62/101, 58 States have provided contact details for their national focal points. We invite those States that have not yet done so, to do so. In 2023, UNOOSA also received 9 notifications by 3 States under Article XI of the Outer Space Treaty.

This summary on the status of formal actions foreseen by the treaties and principles demonstrates the importance of further enhancing the application and implementation of obligations under the United Nations instruments on outer space. The Office thanks States and intergovernmental organizations for their assistance in the fulfilment of these responsibilities under the treaties and principles on outer space and will provide this summary in Annex to my statement.

Chair, Distinguished Delegates,

Allow me also to inform you of our work in building capacity in space law and policy. In November 2023, the Office held the United Nations Conference on Space Law and Policy: “Looking at the Outer Space Treaty and its relevance and applicability for the 21st Century”. In today’s world, where the number of actors that engage in space activities increases every day, it is of utmost importance to ensure that all actors comply with the requirements of international space law in developing international and regional space cooperation.

At national level, under the Space Law for New Space Actors project, the Office continues to raise awareness of, adherence to, and implementation of, the existing normative framework governing outer space activities.

Last year, UNOOSA delivered tailor-made national space law technical advisory missions across three continents, for Chile, Costa Rica and Kenya on drafting a national space policy, assisting with the final steps in the drafting process of a national space law, and raising-awareness of the importance and benefits of ratifying the UN Treaties on Outer Space.

Building on the success of the Technical Advisory Mission (TAM) to the African Region, we organized a regional TAM for APSCO Member States on key elements to consider in a national space law. In January 2024, we organised a regional event with participants from 8 Asia- and the Pacific countries in Tokyo, Japan, on authorization, licensing, and supervision of national space activities. Our team also delivered lectures to graduate students from 18 emerging spacefaring nations enrolled in the Kyutech Space Engineering International Course, with a focus on space law and policy from a national context.

As part of the Space Law for New Space Actors project, I would highlight our interactive eLearning modules on space law and how to develop national space legislation and policy – these are openly accessible to all. I would also highlight the ASTRO database which stands for Accessing Space Treaty Resources Online, which provides diverse information on international and national instruments for space activities. This database was developed for the benefit of all States and has approximately 500 users per month. I would like to encourage more Member States to approach UNOOSA in sharing their national law and policy through this ASTRO database. On our side, we will continue to deliver tailor-made Technical Advisory Missions in 2024, and I really must share with you that the number of requests from Member States continues to increase, such that the Office with its current resources, is actually unable to positively respond to the vast majority, which is a matter of concern. The same is incidentally also true for our Technical Advisory Missions for UN-SPIDER, where we build resilience for Member States, but that is not for this meeting.

Back to matters of space law: this year, UNOOSA will again produce its publication on United Nations Instruments in International Space Law, and we also plan to produce a publication to mark the 50th anniversary of the Registration convention.

Chair, Distinguished Delegates,

In conclusion, it is my pleasure to invite you to numerous side events that are being held in conjunction with this session. We have a Space Sustainability Open Forum on Active Space Debris Removal at lunchtime today. Tomorrow, we have a dedicated side-event on the zero draft of the Pact for the Future, together with Germany and with the participation of the youth represented by SGAC. On 16 April, ESPI will host an evening event at their premises, and on 24 April at lunch time, the IISL and ECSL will hold a side event on capacity building in space law.

If you wish to learn more about the Space Law for New Space Actors project, there will be a side event on Wednesday, 17 April and on Thursday, 18 April at lunchtime, there will be an event on the “The Registration Project: Supporting Implementation of Treaty Obligations related to the Registration of Objects Launched into Outer Space, supported by the UK. More information on all the side-evens can be found on the LSC webpage.

Thank you so much for your kind attention.

Annex: Registration information

With regard to the United Nations Register of Objects Launched into Outer Space, in 2023, 2,587 functional and 49 non-functional space objects were registered with the Secretary-General by Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Belarus, Canada, China, Colombia, Denmark, Djibouti, Finland, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Luxembourg, Monaco, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Türkiye, Uganda, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, Uruguay, Venezuela and EU-METSAT.

Also, in 2023, 585 space object re-entry notifications and additional information for 22 space objects were received from Belgium, Brazil, Colombia, Finland, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Luxembourg, Monaco, New Zealand, Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States.

In 2024, UNOOSA has so far received registrations for another 535 space objects from Armenia, Austria, Colombia, Finland, Ireland, Lithuania, Malaysia, New Zealand, Qatar, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Korea, Senegal, Slovakia, Sweden, Türkiye, the United Kingdom, Uruguay and the United States. UNOOSA would like to take this opportunity to thank States of registry for their assistance in the timely resolution of related issues.

Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 62/101, 58 States have provided contact details on their national focal points and invites those States that have not done so to do so. Concerning other notifications made in 2023, UNOOSA received 9 notifications by the Netherlands (Kingdom of the), the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom under Article XI of the Outer Space Treaty and a notification from Japan under Article V of the Rescue Agreement. To date, in 2024, the Office has received a further four notifications under Article XI of the Outer Space Treaty from the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and the United States.

The Office would, once again, like to thank States and intergovernmental organizations for their assistance in the fulfilment of those responsibilities under the treaties and principles on outer space.

