

**Statement by Richard Buenneke, Representative of the U.S. Delegation to the
66th Session of the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer
Space
Agenda Item 5
“Ways and means of maintaining outer space for peaceful purposes”
June 1, 2023**

Chair,

For nearly four decades, this agenda item has allowed for the constructive exchange of views on how the work of this Committee, its subcommittees, and the UN Office of Outer Space Affairs can contribute to discussions on space security activities in other United Nations fora pursuant to their respective legislative mandates.

The generally positive nature of exchanges on space security in disarmament fora recently convened in New York and Geneva reinforces my delegation’s long-standing view that the work of this Committee in Vienna can and must continue to retain its focus as the premiere venue for the promotion of international space cooperation and study of related legal issues.

As the General Assembly noted in resolution 76/3, this Committee and its subcommittees -- supported by the Office for Outer Space Affairs - are unique platforms for international cooperation in the exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes, for the global governance of outer space activities, consistent with international law, for developing international space law, for fostering dialogue among spacefaring and emerging space nations, and for promoting the increased involvement of all countries in space activities, including through capacity-building initiatives.

In carrying out its mandate for international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space, the Committee advances voluntary, non-legally binding principles and guidelines for the full range of governmental and non-governmental space

activities conducted for peaceful purposes and for the benefit and in the interests of all countries.

In particular, non-legally binding measures such as the Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines and Guidelines for the Long-Term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities, adopted by this Committee in 2007 and 2019, continue to serve as cornerstones for protecting the space environment and advancing key principles of international cooperation in the peaceful uses of space.

As the United States and many other delegations have noted at this Committee and its subcommittees, it is essential that all nations fully implement these voluntary guidelines, which were adopted by consensus in this Committee, and work to ensure their governmental, commercial, and other private sector activities in outer space are also conducted consistently with them.

The United States recognizes that progress in this Committee, as well as in other UN fora, can help advance international cooperation in the responsible, peaceful, and sustainable exploration and use of outer space.

As space activities evolve, the norms, rules, and principles that guide outer space activities also must evolve. As a result, the United States continues to give priority to strengthening the global governance of space activities, including efforts to uphold and strengthen a rules-based international order for space.

Chair, it is worth noting that the U.S. Space Priorities Framework specifically states that “U.S. national security space activities will continue to comply with applicable international law and demonstrate leadership in both the responsible use of space and stewardship of the space environment.”

With regard to global governance, issues specifically associated with the prevention of an arms race in outer space and the use of outer space for national security activities and related matters are more appropriately discussed in fora

whose mandates focus on those issues, such as the Conference on Disarmament, the Disarmament Commission, and the First Committee of the General Assembly. Chair, the United States recognizes there are distinct and complementary efforts in this Committee and the aforementioned UN disarmament fora, We also note the deliberations on certain space-related activities in governing bodies of UN specialized agencies such as the International Telecommunication Union and the World Meteorological Organization.

Chair, The United States also would like to highlight four complementary efforts in other UN fora:

- First, to further underscore the U.S. commitment to the responsible use of space, Vice President Kamala Harris announced on April 18, 2022, that “the United States commits not to conduct destructive direct-ascent anti-satellite missile testing. These tests also put in danger so much of what we do in space. This debris presents a risk to the safety of our astronauts, our satellites, and our growing commercial presence.” My delegation welcomes the wide support on this issue at the UN General Assembly last year. We also welcome specific national commitments not to conduct such tests -- already made by a growing number of States -- as a pragmatic and tangible step forward and encourage others to follow suit.
- Second, the United States was pleased to participate in a very informative and constructive joint panel discussion of the First and Fourth Committees of the UN General Assembly on “Possible challenges to space security and sustainability” on October 27, 2022.
- Third, the United States welcomes the recent adoption by the UN Disarmament Commission (UNDC) of consensus recommendations to promote the practical implementation of transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities. In particular, the United States thanks Ms. Szilvia Balazs of Hungary, Chair of the Disarmament Commission’s Working Group II, for her leadership.
- Finally, the United States will continue to take an active role in the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on “Reducing Space Threats on Norms,

Rules and Principles of Responsible Behavior” established pursuant to UN General Assembly resolution 76/231. The United States thanks Mr. Hellmut Lagos of Chile for his leadership at the working group. The United States looks forward to the OEWG’s final session in August. We hope the group can adopt a consensus report which both documents the group’s inclusive and substantive discussion and makes concrete recommendations for norms, rules, and principles of responsible State behavior. As the United States noted at the OEWG’s third session in January, “adherence during peacetime to a common set of voluntary, non-legally binding measures can increase stability and predictability, enable crisis management, enhance operational safety, and reduce the risks of misperception and miscalculation, thus contributing to the prevention of conflict.”

Chair, underscoring the importance of both complementary discussions in other fora and these recent developments, the United States will give its fullest consideration to the policy brief “For all Humanity: The Future of Outer Space Governance” published by Secretary General Guterres as an input to planned multi-stakeholder dialogue on space as part of the Summit of the Future in September 2024. In particular, the United States believes the multi-stakeholder dialogue can most productively focus on opportunities for improved coordination across the UN system, which build upon the consensus-based work of his Committee as well as outcomes of discussions on space security in disarmament-related fora.