

*United Nations Conference on Space Law and Policy:
“Emerging Issues in Space Law and Policy - Perspectives for African Nations”
Organized in Cooperation with the Economic Commission for Africa
Virtual
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**Opening Remarks by Simonetta Di Pippo
Director of the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA)**

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA), it is my honor to welcome you to our United Nations Conference on Space Law and Policy. We organize this event in cooperation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and with the support of the African Union Commission. I also appreciate the support given by the Government of Ethiopia. The conference was originally planned to take place this year in Addis Abeba, but due to the pandemic situation we switched to virtual.

I would like to sincerely thank all the speakers and panelists who have decided to give us their time and expertise to ensure that we all get the most out of this event. We will together discuss a broad area of emerging issues in space law and policy and look into perspectives for African Nations.

Distinguished Participants,

The conference connects well to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG 16 which is devoted to “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”.

Space has become an indispensable tool for our very way of life, and we cannot risk losing the benefits it offers, not even for a short period of time. It has transformed many industries and became instrumental for the implementation of the SDGs. Research by UNOOSA shows that more than 40 percent of the 169 targets are benefitting, in one way or another, from space-based data and infrastructure.

In this context, we will have opportunities these coming days to discuss topics connecting legal and policy matters in areas affecting the governance of space activities. We

will also discuss and review how space science, technology, law and policy relate to, influence and support development objectives and ensure that the benefits of space are available to all.

Here I wish to note that UNOOSA works since long with stakeholders across the scientific, technical, legal, and policy fields of international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space. We maintain close partnership with African nations at the national, regional and international level.

Distinguished Participants,

The outer space environment is a limited resource and unregulated space activities might, sooner or later, lead into problems. Today we count around 2.500 functional satellites with tens of thousands to be launched in this decade. Mega-constellations of satellites; small satellites; cube sats; micro sats are all examples which will add to this scenario. While these developments obviously contribute to human development and to the evolution of access to communication, therefore helping bridge the digital divide, at the same time this development can create legal and operational concerns, in particular due to space debris.

Today, we have an estimated number of 34 000 objects larger than 10 cm and close to 130 million objects from 1 mm to 10 cm in orbit around the Earth. All objects, no matter which size, can pose a risk of damaging active and functional satellites and also present concrete risks for astronauts in orbit.

Those are critical emerging issues that will influence action at all governance levels.

Distinguished Participants,

Over decades, the United Nations General Assembly, in its annual resolution on international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space, reaffirms the importance of international cooperation in developing international law, including international space law. International space law is essential for governing international cooperation for the exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes. The annual resolution also reaffirms the importance of the widest possible adherence to international treaties that promote the peaceful uses of outer space.

Emerging issues in space law and policy will likely require new approaches in applying the rights and obligations of States under the legal regime of outer space. At their core, these new approaches recognize and build on the dynamic relationship between space actors

spanning the spectrum from government to private industry and offer unique opportunities to tackle difficult issues in space.

Today, stakeholders around the world are accessing the space environment with substantial investments in space activities. With an increasing evolution of new actors, there is a pressing need to enhance efforts to raise awareness of, and adherence to, the existing normative framework governing space activities. Cross-cutting approaches involving the full spectrum of space science, technology, law and policy is paramount.

The bottom line is to guarantee that future generations can enjoy the benefits space offers, a safe, secure and sustainable space environment is a must. Cooperation and multilateral action are required to protect the sustainability of the space environment and to safeguard that we can continue using space-based assets for the benefit of sustainable development on Earth. UNOOSA stands ready to continuously foster this way forward.

Welcome to this important event, I wish you all great discussions, great achievements and above all, great cooperation!
