



“Return to sender”

- Fifty years of the Rescue Agreement and the
role of the United Nations

NIKLAS HEDMAN
Chief, CPLA



Agreement on the Rescue of Astronauts, the Return of Astronauts and the Return of Objects Launched into Outer Space (the Rescue Agreement)

Second treaty on outer space drafted under auspices of the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space

Adopted on 19 December 1967 by the General Assembly resolution 2345 (XXII)

Opened for signature on 22 April 1968

Entered into force on 3 December 1968



Agreement on the Rescue of Astronauts, the Return of Astronauts and the Return of Objects Launched into Outer Space (the Rescue Agreement)

As of 1 January 2018:

- 96 States Parties;
- 23 signatory States;
- 2 international intergovernmental organizations had declared their acceptance of the rights and obligations.
- Latest State Party: Nicaragua



Note: The boundaries used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

OST: 107 States Parties/23 signatory States

LIAB: 95 States Parties/19 signatory States

REG: 67 States Parties/3 signatory States

MOON: 18 States parties/4 signatory States



Background

Subject matter was under consideration from the very outset of space era

The importance of the matter was brought up already in 1959 during the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space

In 1962, in response to the letter of President Kennedy (USA), Chairman Khrushchev (USSR), among other things, wrote: “...it is very desirable to draft and conclude an international agreement providing for assistance in the search for and rescue of spaceships, sputniks and capsules that descend to the earth due to accident.” (A/AC.105/2)



Background (continued)

Declaration of Legal Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space (General Assembly resolution 1962 (XVIII)):

9. States shall regard astronauts as envoys of mankind in outer space, and shall render to them all possible assistance in the event of accident, distress, or emergency landing on the territory of a foreign State or on the high seas. Astronauts who make such a landing shall be safely and promptly returned to the State of registry of their space vehicle.

The text of the Rescue Agreement was developed by the Legal Subcommittee over almost a decade



“Operational” aspects of the Rescue Agreement

Two aspects:

Recovery and return of astronauts (Article 2 “rescue them and render them all necessary assistance”)

Recovery and return of non-crewed objects



Apollo 13

To date, the only space mission which could have triggered the Recuse Agreement is Apollo 13

Third US mission intended to land on the Moon
launched in July 1970

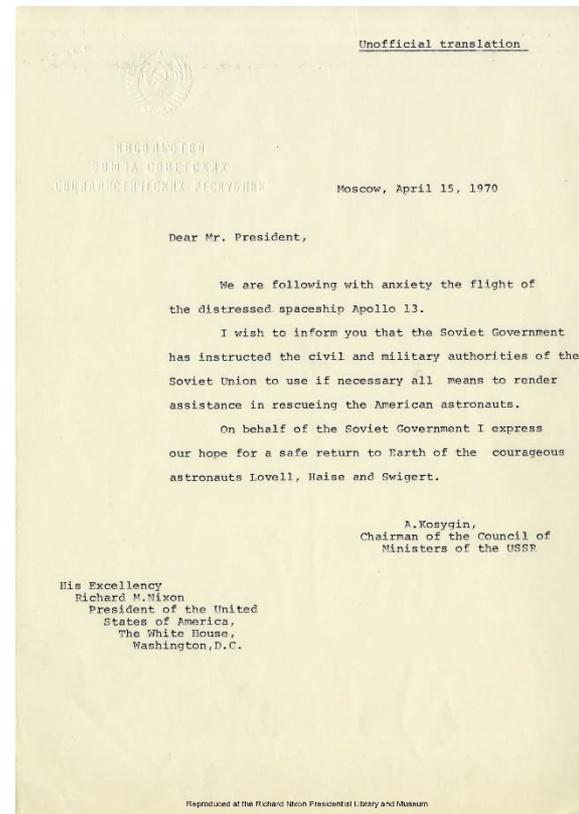
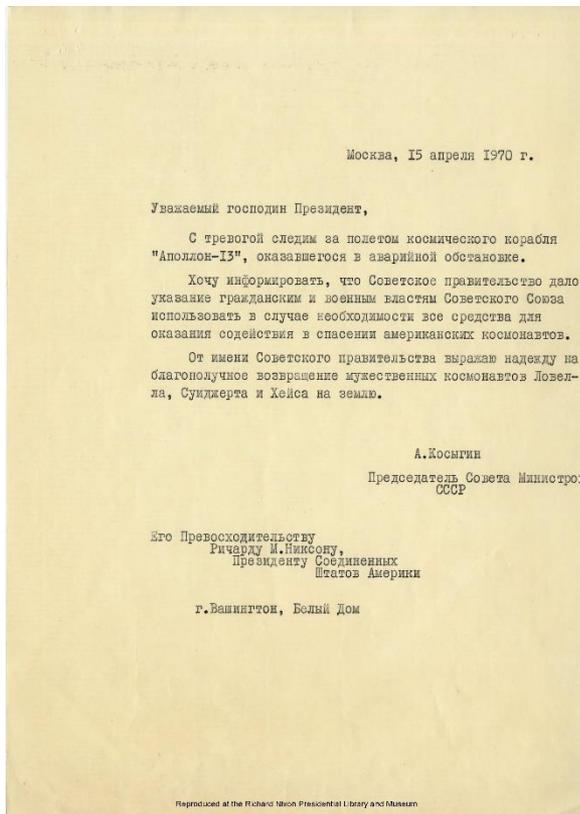
Mission aborted due to oxygen tank explosion in Service Module during second day. Crew used Lunar Module as a “lifeboat” and safely returned to Earth six days after launch

During the incident, the USSR offered assistance to the United States of America





Offer of assistance from USSR to USA





Recovery and return of space objects

First recovery of “foreign” space objects the UN is aware of is Sputnik-IV (international designator 1960-EPSILON 1). Parts of space object shown during 15th meeting of COPUOS in September 1962

Earliest notification to the Secretary-General on record is from Nepal dated 1 July 1968 provided “in the spirit” of the Rescue Agreement which had not yet entered into force (opened for signature on 22 April 1968, entered into force on 3 December 1968)

First notification under the Rescue Agreement is from 9 April 1969 from the United States

Most recent notification is from 9 February 2018 from Peru

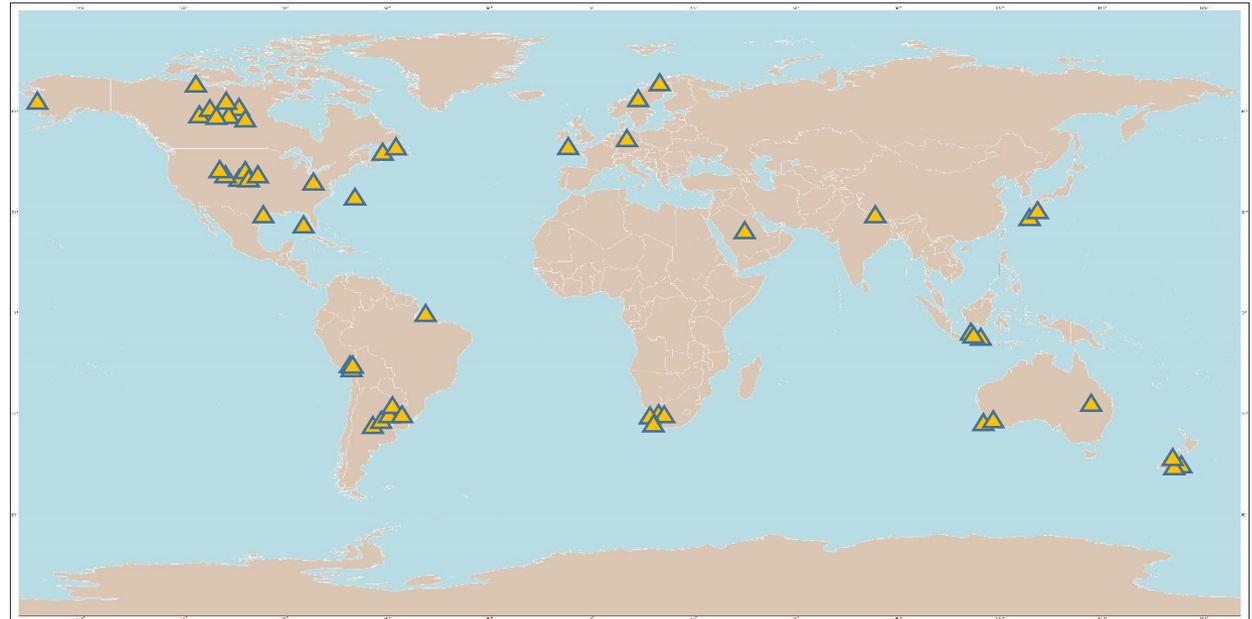
Total number of recovered space objects as notified to the SG: ~ **140 objects (and ~4,000 small particles)**



Reported recovery of space objects: 1968-present

Notifications to the Secretary-General:

- 1968 Nepal
- 1969 Sweden, USA
- 1970 South Africa, USA
- 1972 Canada, New Zealand
- 1974 USA
- 1978 Canada, Sweden
- 1979 Australia, Canada, Germany
- 1984 USA
- 1991 Argentina
- 1999 Japan
- 2000 South Africa, USA
- 2001 Saudi Arabia
- 2004 Argentina
- 2007 Australia
- 2010 Japan
- 2011 Uruguay
- 2012 UK
- 2013 USA
- 2014 Brazil
- 2015 UK
- 2016 Indonesia, USA
- 2018 Peru



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Types of objects recovered

Recovered objects often include spherical objects (such as tanks for fuel system pressurization), cylindrical objects (fuel tanks/upper-stages) or payload shrouds



Recovered 2018 (A/AC.105/1139)



Recovered 2015 (A/AC.105/1117)



Recovered 2001 (A/AC.105/762)



Types of information provided

Information provided by States to the Secretary-General include:

Date of Discovery

Location of Discovery (either map coordinates of general location (x km from city y)

Physical Characteristics (including dimensions, mass, material, identifying features)

Originating space object (when identified)

A list of recovered objects and their notification can be found

UNOOSA's website: <http://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/treatyimplementation/arra-art-v/unlfd.html>

Notification mechanism same for space object registration, i.e. Note Verbale from Permanent Missions. Disseminated as UN documents in all official languages



Why inform the Secretary-General?

Identification through social media and internet resources

The question of “why bother to inform the Secretary-General” has been raised several times during discussions in meetings

Apart from being a treaty requirement, reasons to have the SG “in-the-loop”:

- Open communication channel under international law

- Consolidated global overview of space events

- Neutral mechanism to address high-level of public interest in certain re-entry events

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THANK YOU



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