

Brazil - Agenda item 7 – Space Debris

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Madam Chair,

Brazil remains concerned about the threat to the stability of space operations posed by space debris, whose deleterious effects are not restricted to the immediate physical consequences arising from the risk of collisions but tend to extend to questions like security and sovereignty.

The physical threat is well-known. The expansion of activities in space, particularly in some orbits, gives rise to concerns about our ability to prevent the generation of debris, track fragments and prevent collisions. The COPUOS space debris mitigation guidelines are an invaluable resource in this field, but several issues remain and deserve the attention of this Subcommittee.

There seems to be no truly universal standard to define acceptable levels of debris generation in space operations. Although mitigation is a key element of mission design, we cannot rest assured that all actors across the board can deliver the same performance in this respect. What are our standards for tracking debris and how should this information be shared? What kind of information should be shared and in what format? How are new actors supposed to deal with the debris generated by the activities of traditional actors in the past? While concrete efforts to address space debris are underway, and they represent an invaluable contribution, they are not accessible to all space actors. We hear of debris removal technologies, but how can we address the cost of these technologies and ensure we have unrestricted access to them? Finally, how do we reconcile removal operations with concerns about security and undue interference?

These are just a few questions that illustrate the complexity of the problem. We must not lose sight that this is a problem of global interest that affects traditional, emerging, new and future space actors. As such, concerted efforts are needed to develop global solutions that can be adopted and implemented by all. From the perspective of emerging and new space actors, it is essential that any solutions should not create hurdles or barriers of cost and access to mitigation and removal technologies. International cooperation is therefore essential to promote capacity-building and enable all those involved in space activities to contribute to a safer and stabler space environment.

A final point that we wish to address is the need for improved communication and transparency. The lack of internationally agreed standards and mechanisms for the exchange of information on space debris means that space operators may not be able to produce accurate assessments of proximity events or collisions. If intent cannot be determined, there is always a risk that such an event could lead to heightened tensions in an environment strongly associated with national security concerns. In this regard, it is not unlikely that decisions with serious implications to the stability of the outer space environment may be made on the basis of insufficient or erroneous information. This is simply too great a risk and we should consider alternatives to address such scenarios by, for

instance, discussing the possibility of setting up an information exchange mechanism on space objects that allows us to agree on what kind of information should be shared and in what format, clearly outlines procedures to be followed and identifies points of contact. In addition, such a mechanism could address the need to improve debris tracking systems to deliver better reliance and accuracy.

We would welcome the views of fellow delegations and we are ready to work with interested parties to advance this discussion in this Subcommittee.

Thank you.