

INFORMATION NOTE

United Nations/World Health Organization/Switzerland Conference on Strengthening Space Cooperation for Global Health

Geneva, Switzerland
23-25 August, 2017

Rationale and Context

This Conference will have the UNISPACE+50 (*see information box on page 4*) Thematic Priority nr. 5 - “Strengthened Space Cooperation for Global Health” - as the central theme while also considering the relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and will aim at fostering dialogue on how to create and reinforce relevant partnerships for better utilization of space-based assets, data and technologies in addressing global health. The Conference will cover a number of essential aspects such as showcasing global health initiatives and their use of space technologies, data access, data provision services and information sharing - including data and services interoperability, capacity building, funding for gap-filling projects, identification of key stakeholders and further definition of a roadmap for progressing in the development of this thematic priority. The outcomes and recommendations identified will provide inputs for the report on this thematic priority to be delivered for UNISPACE+50.

The United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) is the United Nations office responsible for promoting international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space. UNOOSA serves as the secretariat for the General Assembly's only committee working exclusively with international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space: the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS). Through the United Nations Programme on Space Applications, UNOOSA provides technical advisory services on space applications upon request by Member States or by any specialized agencies and organizes international workshops to build capacity in remote sensing, satellite navigation, satellite meteorology, tele-education and basic space sciences for the benefit of developing nations.

The World Health Organization (WHO) is the coordinating authority for health within the United Nations system. It is responsible for providing leadership on global health matters, shaping the health research agenda, setting norms and standards, articulating evidence-based policy options, providing technical support to countries, and monitoring and assessing health trends. Working through offices in more than 150 countries, WHO staff work side by side with governments and other partners to ensure the highest attainable level of health for all people.

At its 59th Session in June 2016, COPUOS endorsed seven thematic priorities for the preparation of UNISPACE+50 and identified strengthened space cooperation for global health as one of them (see §296, A1.5 in A/71/20). The objectives under this thematic priority will also guide the organization of the Conference.

As recommended by COPUOS, UNOOSA supports within its resources the established COPUOS Scientific and Technical Subcommittee (STSC) Expert Group on Space and Global Health (the Expert Group) to further coordinate the implementation of this thematic priority.

Applications of space-based systems to global health could be classified in three main areas through the following activities:

- *Earth observation/Remote Sensing*: collecting valuable local, regional, and global scale data and information that can support public health decision-making, such as for epidemics, disease management, and planning for well-being and to study and monitor vector-borne diseases
- *Telecommunication/positioning and tracking*: supporting tele-health and tele-medicine applications for transmitting medical advice and information to and from rural or isolated areas with limited access to adequate medical support, tele-epidemiology and tracking vector-borne diseases
- *Space-based research (such as on-board the International Space Station)*: study physiologic reactions and identifying potential cures and treatments for major diseases, such as cancer

Objectives

In order to strengthen the ongoing processes in the lead up to UNISPACE+50 and to address the UNISPACE+50 thematic priority focusing on global health, with the aim to identify gaps, needs, opportunities and recommendations for inclusion into the report prepared for UNISPACE+50 on this thematic priority, and to also support the Expert Group in its contributions, it was agreed that a dedicated flagship event is needed during 2017 to review and consider space cooperation for global health related activities, and to bring together the space and the global health communities to also explore potential future projects and collaborations.

This Conference will therefore also take into consideration past expert meetings and workshops, as well as past reports of COPUOS addressing space and global health.

The Expert Group established a roadmap articulated (A/AC.105/C.1/2017/CRP.28) with respect to the cross-cutting areas underpinning the UNISPACE+50 thematic priorities, namely Governance, Capacity Building, Resiliency, Interoperability and Space for Sustainable Development.

These cross-cutting areas, **in particular resilience and interoperability**, will therefore provide the conceptual framework and guide the organization of conference sessions and discussion panels, as well as the development of recommendations that will result from the conference.

Conference contributions will also be considered under the four above-mentioned pillars space economy, space society, space accessibility and space diplomacy, with a longer-term view towards the Space2030 vision.

The main objectives guiding the organization of the conference are those defined under the thematic priority on strengthened space cooperation for global health, also in line with the longer-term objectives of COPUOS, UNOOSA and WHO:

- To improve the use of space technologies and space-based information and systems in the global health domain,
- To promote enhanced cooperation and sharing of information in emergencies, epidemics and early warning events, as well as on environmental parameters,
- To enhance capability in integrating health data in disaster management plans,
- To strengthen capacity-building in advancing space technologies in global health efforts,
- To identify governance and cooperation mechanisms to support this objective.

The objectives will be introduced and addressed through a series of presentations, panel discussions and interactive dialogue, aiming also at strengthening international cooperation among relevant institutions. Contributions expected should be identifying opportunities and solutions offered by various space technologies described above.

UNOOSA already identified strong interdependency and linkages between disaster management and the public health sector as well, requiring space-based support as well as better space technology- and geospatial data availability at different levels for improved information or solutions to address problems. In addition, the 2015 Report of the meeting on the applications of space science and technology for public health (A/AC.105/1099) identifies the importance of global health priorities and the need for full use of space science and technology for advancing health goals of the United Nations' and WHO's Member States.

In order to also enhance existing partnerships and forge new ones in the area bridging space and global health, the Conference will also serve as a platform to engage with other international actors and specific intergovernmental entities that would help provide a broader perspective on "One-health" in the context of space applications for global health.

The Group on Earth Observations (GEO), given its efforts to promote Earth observations under an agreed societal benefit area on public health surveillance, will also be invited to support and contribute to the conference.

Given the large number of activities providing space technology support for global health and its interest in this thematic priority, the European Space Agency (ESA) will be invited to contribute to the Conference as well.

Special Events at the Conference

A high level segment of the Conference is to be planned in coordination with the Government of Switzerland, aimed at raising awareness, advancing the implementation of SDG 3 and related targets and galvanizing support for use of space science and technologies for advancing public health. The segment will include senior officials of UN, WHO, and representatives of select Member States. All UN Permanent Missions located in Geneva will be encouraged to attend as well.

An open session of UN-Space (the United Nations Interagency Meeting on Outer Space Activities)¹ will be organized as an integral segment of the Conference (on 24th August) to provide yet another opportunity for the participants of the Conference to engage in a dialogue with Geneva-based diplomatic staff (e.g. Permanent Mission representatives) and UN entities and other organisations representatives with a view to raise awareness and build common understanding on the use of space technologies in support of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the area of global health.

In the framework of UN-Space, OOSA has recently coordinated the preparation of a special report on space for global health², confirming thus the interest of many UN entities in this domain.

Anticipated Outcomes

The Conference shall be a starting point for building an active community of practice interested in pursuing collaborations, capacity building activities and enabling a growing network of experts engaged in the use of space sciences and technologies for global health applications.

It is foreseen that all conference participants, representatives of UN entities attending and representatives of WHO technical departments from all six regions of WHO will be better informed about the potential contributions of space technology applicable to their mandated activities, and that specific activities, applications or technologies will be identified for concrete follow-up initiatives and projects.

¹ <http://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/ourwork/un-space/>

² http://www.unoosa.org/oosa/oosadoc/data/documents/2015/aac.105/aac.1051091_0.html

Participants

- (a) Staff and officials of UNOOSA and WHO
- (b) Relevant space agency representatives
- (c) Relevant experts and practitioners from other United Nations or International Organizations
- (d) Representatives of the Permanent Missions in Geneva
- (e) Experts, policy-makers from member states, and from other relevant organizations active in the field of space and/or health.

A total of approximately 100 participants are expected, including invited experts as well as staff of WHO, ITU and other United Nations entities, GEO and other International Organizations interested in the subjects addressed. While the in-person participation will be limited, the Conference will be also broadcast through WebEx to also allow for larger scale participation of those interested.

Meeting Dates

23-25 August 2017

Meeting Venue

World Health Organization Headquarters
Geneva, Switzerland

Funding

- WHO will provide conference facilities and secretarial support;
- The Government of Switzerland will contribute funds to support travel of selected expert participants and participants from developing countries;
- UNOOSA will provide organizational and secretarial support, and will also contribute funds for travel support for developing county participants;
- European Space Agency (ESA) will contribute funds for travel support of select participants;
- In-kind contributions from GEO and/or other organizations is expected.

UNISPACE+50

The year 2018 will mark the 50th anniversary of the first United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space - UNISPACE+50. The Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) at its fifty-eighth session in June 2015 endorsed the plan of work for UNISPACE+50. UNISPACE+50 will review the contributions that the three UNISPACE conferences (UNISPACE I, held in 1968, UNISPACE II, held in 1982, and UNISPACE III, held in 1999) have made to global space governance. In line with the 2030 Agenda for Development and Sustainable Development Goals, UNISPACE+50 aims to chart the future role of COPUOS, its subsidiary bodies and the United Nations Office of Outer Space Affairs, at a time of an evolving and more complex space agenda when more participants, both governmental and non-governmental, are increasingly involved in ventures to explore space and carry out space activities. The activities of the United Nations Programme on Space Applications are an integral part of the UNISPACE+50 thematic cycle and are aimed at contributing to outputs under the four pillars space economy, space society, space accessibility and space diplomacy. For additional information on UNISPACE+50 see <http://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/ourwork/hlf/hlf.html>.