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Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space
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Item 7 of the provisional agenda*
Use of nuclear power sources in outer space

Proposed work plan for developing an international technically based framework of goals and recommendations for the safety of nuclear power source applications in outer space

Working paper submitted by Argentina, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America

I. Background

1. At the thirty-ninth session of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, the Subcommittee agreed that the Working Group on the Use of Nuclear Power Sources in Outer Space should be requested to continue its work between the thirty-ninth and the fortieth sessions of the Subcommittee to facilitate the Subcommittee's deliberations on the use of nuclear power in outer space. In particular, the Working Group was requested to develop a set of potential options for consideration by the Subcommittee on any additional steps that might be deemed appropriate with regard to space nuclear power sources (NPS), including that of drawing up a further multi-year work plan. Development of those options was initiated through informal consultations by several Member States during the forty-fifth session of the Committee.

2. During those informal consultations, consideration was given to several options for the future work of the Subcommittee on space NPS including: no further action; the pursuit of focused topical studies; the development of an international

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technically based framework for space NPS safety; revision/supplement of the Principles Relevant to the Use of Nuclear Power Sources in Outer Space, adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 47/68 of 14 December 1992; and a combination of certain options.

3. The option of no further action was dismissed from further consideration because it was believed that it would be constructive to continue efforts to build upon the 2002 report of the Working Group on the Use of Nuclear Power Sources in Outer Space entitled "A review of international documents and national processes potentially relevant to the peaceful uses of nuclear power sources in outer space" (A/AC.105/781) in order to take account of the most recent advances in nuclear safety and radiation protection standards. The option of the early revision/supplement of the Principles Relevant to the Use of Nuclear Power Sources in Outer Space was considered premature given the logical need for establishing an international consensus on a technically based framework for space NPS safety at the present time.

4. The options of the pursuit of focused topical studies and the development of an international technically based framework for space NPS safety were considered appropriate subsequent steps for action by the Subcommittee, especially in light of the above-mentioned report of the Working Group (A/AC.105/781).

5. A work plan, described below, is proposed to pursue both of the options in parallel.

II. Work plan

6. Consistent with the work plan adopted during the thirty-fourth session of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee in 1997, Argentina, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America propose that the Subcommittee initiate a new multi-year work plan for the Working Group on the Use of Nuclear Power Sources in Outer Space. The objective of the work plan would be to establish the objectives, scope and attributes of an international technically based framework of goals and recommendations for the safety of planned and currently foreseeable space NPS applications. The implementation of the framework through a flexible partnership with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) should be investigated, with a view to benefiting from that organization's relevant expertise and well-established procedures for developing safety standards.

III. Schedule of work

7. The co-sponsors of the proposed work plan recommend the following schedule of work:

2003:

(a) Adopt a schedule of work;

(b) Invite national and regional space agencies to present information to the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee in 2004 and 2005 on the content of relevant

national (including bilateral or multilateral) space NPS programmes and applications planned or currently foreseeable;

(c) Invite national and regional space agencies to present information to the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee in 2004 on the applications enabled or significantly enhanced by space NPS;

(d) Conduct preliminary discussions on objectives and attributes for an international technically based framework of goals and recommendations for the safety of planned and currently foreseeable space NPS applications;

(e) Invite IAEA by June 2003 to define the specific processes and mechanisms (including their timeframe, resources and administrative requirements) that the Agency could use to participate with the Subcommittee in developing space NPS technical safety standards;

(f) Request the Office for Outer Space Affairs and IAEA by June 2003 to jointly prepare possible organizational plans providing for (i) potential co-sponsorship of an effort to develop an international space NPS technical safety standard and (ii) potential IAEA advice to the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee in the preparation of such a standard.

2004:

(a) Review information from national and regional space agencies on the content of relevant national (including bilateral and multilateral) space NPS programmes and applications planned or currently foreseeable;

(b) Review information from national and regional space agencies on the applications enabled or significantly enhanced by space NPS;

(c) Review IAEA-specific processes and mechanisms (including their timeframe, resources and administrative requirements) that the Agency could use to participate with the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee in developing space NPS technical safety standards;

(d) Prepare a draft outline of the objectives, scope and attributes for an international technically based framework of goals and recommendations for the safety of planned and currently foreseeable space NPS applications;

(e) Prepare a draft set of potential implementation options for establishing an international technically based framework of goals and recommendations for the safety of planned and currently foreseeable space NPS applications;

(f) If appropriate, make a preliminary decision on whether to recommend co-sponsorship with IAEA of a technical standard development effort starting in 2006.[1]

[1] Such a preliminary decision would allow for the inclusion of any necessary provisions in the IAEA programme and budget for 2006-2007.

2005:

(a) Review information from national and regional space agencies on the content of relevant national (including bilateral and multilateral) space NPS programmes and applications planned or currently foreseeable;

(b) Prepare a final outline of the objectives, scope and attributes of an international technically based framework of goals and recommendations for assuring the safety of planned and currently foreseeable space NPS applications;

(c) Prepare a draft report based on the final outline, including potential implementation options.

2006: Prepare the final report and provide a recommended implementation option to the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee.

8. To the extent appropriate, the Working Group will attempt to hold intersessional meetings to facilitate or accelerate the successful completion of the work plan.