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Implementation of the recommendations of the Third United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNISPACE III)

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Final report of the Action Team on Increasing Awareness

I. Introduction

1. The recommendations contained in the resolution entitled "The Space Millennium: Vienna Declaration on Space and Human Development",[1] which was adopted by the Third United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNISPACE III), held in Vienna in July 1999, and endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 54/68 of 6 December 1999, reaffirmed the aims and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. Those recommendations are also a major contribution to promoting an effective means of using space technology to assist in solving problems of regional or global significance, and of strengthening capabilities to use space applications for economic, social and cultural development. The Vienna Declaration recommends, inter alia, that action should be taken to increase awareness among decision makers and the general public of the importance of peaceful space activities for improving the common economic and social welfare of humanity.

2. Since the successful conclusion of UNISPACE III, a number of major United Nations conferences and events have taken place that have significantly shaped the global agenda and collective approaches to meeting present and future challenges. These include the Millennium Summit of the United Nations, held in 2000, the

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World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in 2002, and the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, held in 2003. The results of these summits have important implications with respect to the global priorities to be addressed in the twenty-first century. Implicitly or explicitly, their final documents also highlight the relevance of space science and technology to those global priorities.

3. Following the Millennium Summit, the Secretary-General, after consultations with, among others, the Secretariat of the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and the World Bank, prepared a report entitled "Road map towards the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration" (A/56/326). In his report, the Secretary-General presented a list of eight Millennium Development Goals to be achieved by 2015: (a) eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; (b) improve maternal health; (c) achieve universal primary education; (d) combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; (e) promote gender equality and empower women; (f) ensure environmental sustainability; (g) reduce child mortality; and (h) develop a global partnership for development. In its resolution 56/95 of 14 December 2001, the General Assembly invited interested parties to consider the "road map" when formulating plans for implementing goals related to the Millennium Declaration.

4. By adopting the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development and the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the Governments represented at the World Summit on Sustainable Development agreed on a wide range of concrete commitments and actions in the five priority areas identified by the Secretary-General: water, energy, health, agriculture and biodiversity. The Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development contains a number of explicit references to space-based technology, particularly as related to water, disaster management, climate change, environmental protection, the development and wider use of Earth observation technologies and data collection. Similarly, the Plan of Action adopted by the World Summit on the Information Society during its first phase, in addressing issues of information and communication infrastructure, clearly identifies the role of space-based technology in achieving the goal of digital inclusion.

5. The peaceful use of outer space certainly contributes to meeting the aforementioned goals and priorities set by the international community to improve the common economic and social welfare of humanity. The challenge is to match space capabilities with specific targets in a way that yields tangible results through concrete action and to enhance awareness in this regard.

6. Against this background, the Action Team on Increasing Awareness embarked on (a) evaluating ongoing efforts to increase awareness among decision makers and the general public of the value of space activities and the role that space activities can play in key areas such as sustainable development; (b) preparing a list of illustrative examples of successful outreach activities; (c) identifying potential outreach activities, in particular with regard to the work of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and the Office for Outer Space Affairs of the Secretariat; and (d) providing recommendations on future outreach activities.

II. Evaluation of ongoing efforts

7. Actions relevant to increasing awareness of the importance of space activities are being carried out at the intergovernmental, governmental, and non-governmental levels, partly within the framework of specifically designed activities. As it was not feasible to compile a complete account of relevant activities worldwide, the Action Team focused on selecting and examining illustrative examples. With regard to the intergovernmental activities, the main emphasis was placed on relevant global conferences, the work of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and the activities of the Office for Outer Space Affairs.

8. In order to facilitate the process of gathering specific information from Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental entities, the Action Team, assisted by the Office for Outer Space Affairs, conducted an Internet-based survey by circulating questionnaires among all member States, as well as among all organizations having permanent observer status with the Committee, in order to obtain information on their efforts to increase awareness of the importance of space activities. The compilation of the replies received will be made available electronically and will be continuously updated to become a comprehensive, dynamic source of information on awareness-increasing efforts.

III. Illustrative examples

A. The multilateral field

9. The General Assembly, in its resolution 55/122 of 8 December 2000, agreed that the benefits of space technology and its applications should be prominently brought to the attention of conferences organized within the United Nations system to address global issues relating to social, economic and cultural development and that the use of space technology should be promoted towards achieving the objectives of those conferences and implementing the United Nations Millennium Declaration. In a letter dated 19 July 2001, the Chairman of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space informed the Secretary-General, as requested by the Committee, of the recommendation of the Committee that major United Nations conferences should consider the contributions of space science and technology to a greater extent, taking into particular account the needs of developing countries (A/56/306).

10. The Scientific and Technical Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, in its report on its fortieth session, held in 2003, noted with satisfaction that, through the presentations made by national and international space agencies and organizations at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the usefulness of space applications in advancing sustainable development had been demonstrated. That accomplishment was supportive of the recommendations of UNISPACE III, namely, those seeking to increase awareness among decision makers and the general public of the importance of peaceful space activities, to promote sustainable development by applying the results of space research, to increase the use of space-related systems and services by the entities of the United Nations system and by the private sector and to improve the management of the Earth's natural resources (A/AC.105/804, para. 62).

11. In its resolution 58/89 of 9 December 2003, the General Assembly noted with satisfaction the increased efforts of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and its Scientific and Technical Subcommittee, as well as the Office for Outer Space Affairs and the Inter-Agency Meeting on Outer Space Activities, to promote the use of space science and technology and their applications in carrying out actions recommended in the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Significant work aimed at further enhancing awareness and coordination regarding space-related activities within the United Nations system is also being carried out at the Inter-Agency Meeting on Outer Space Activities. Its twenty-fourth session, held at the headquarters of the World Meteorological Organization, in Geneva, in 2004, was of particular significance in this regard. That session was immediately followed by the first open, informal session of the Meeting, which members of the Committee were invited to attend.

12. The Office for Outer Space Affairs increased its efforts to bring to the attention of the global conferences held within the United Nations system the potential benefits of space science and technology and their applications, as well as their potential to assist in achieving the objectives of such conferences. On the occasion of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the Office issued a special booklet entitled “Space solutions for the world’s problems: how the United Nations family is using space technology for sustainable development”. The booklet was prepared in cooperation with the entities of the United Nations system that participate in the Inter-Agency Meeting and was distributed to the delegations attending the World Summit. Immediately prior to the World Summit, the Office organized a symposium on the use of space technology for sustainable development in Stellenbosch, South Africa, from 21 to 23 August 2002. The aim of the symposium was to increase the awareness of the decision makers participating in the World Summit of the usefulness of space technology and its applications in promoting sustainable development. The Office also conducted a survey among Member States and United Nations entities on initiatives and programmes carried out in response to the action items contained in the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit. When they become available, the results of the survey will be made available on the web site of the Office (www.oosa.unvienna.org), to be used as a tool both by those decision makers, as well as programme managers and others, who are responsible for implementing programmes or projects at the national, regional or global level as follow-up to the World Summit and who may be interested in using space technology and its applications.

13. With the support of the Government of Austria, the Office is organizing three annual symposiums, to be held in 2003, 2004 and 2005, to promote the use of demonstrated capabilities to support actions called for in the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. The first of these, the United Nations/Thailand Workshop on the Contribution of Space Communication Technology to Bridging the Digital Divide, organized by the Office for Outer Space Affairs for the region of Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok in September 2003, was aimed at contributing to the World Summit on the Information Society from the viewpoint of the satellite communications sector (A/AC.105/810). The observations and recommendations made by the participants were subsequently transmitted to the secretariat of the World Summit. On 12 December 2003, the Office for Outer Space Affairs also organized an ad hoc panel of internationally known satellite experts during the World Summit.

14. Among the multilateral initiatives outside the United Nations system, the Earth Observation Summit, hosted by the United States and held in Washington, D.C., on 31 July 2003, and the ad hoc Group on Earth Observations, established as a result of the Summit, should be mentioned. This provides an example of how decision makers have been approached and how they have committed or are about to commit major resources for more efficient spaced-based Earth observation mechanisms.

B. Regional approaches

15. Governments play a key role in promoting awareness of the benefits of space activities, technology and applications through their concerned authorities, agencies and relevant programmes. They also have to keep abreast of developments in this field, despite the fact that their efforts towards and capabilities of promoting awareness of such benefits are constrained by a variety of factors, including financial, technological and administrative capacities.

16. There are obvious benefits to be gained by States willing to cooperate in translating scientific and technological progress into policies and programmes for applications in a field in which developments are characterized not only by immense scientific and technological progress, an increasingly competitive environment and a complex diversity of actors and interests, but also by growing gaps in countries' capabilities to use space technology for the common benefit. Regional cooperation can offer particular advantages in this regard.

17. Asia and the Pacific provides an enlightening example in this respect. Many of the leading innovators in the region, some of them space-faring, are developing countries with a particular interest in using space technology in the service of sustainable development. The Regional Space Applications Programme for Sustainable Development of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific has proved to be a useful mechanism for furthering the effective use of space-based technologies and applications for achieving sustainable development in the region.

18. In addressing the priority of raising awareness among policy planners and decision makers, involving all sectors at all levels of decision-making, RESAP provides successful examples that could serve as models for other regions and subregions.

19. In Europe, the Global Monitoring for Environment and Security (GMES) initiative provides an outstanding example of an initiative aimed at coordinating existing, as well as new technologies and systems, to better meet a structured demand for information by national, regional and local decision makers and users. GMES will address the common needs of public authorities that are to be identified in various policy areas, such as in the case of information on land cover, which will contribute to the prediction and management of floods, forest fires and crop yields, as well as to the monitoring of carbon sinks and sources within the framework of the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

C. Space organizations

20. International and national space organizations are important actors in promoting awareness of space activities. While international space organizations provide the necessary frameworks for cooperation, coordination and the development of global policy perspectives, national agencies act as interfaces between international networks, the public and private sectors, science and research communities and end-users. They are ideally placed to facilitate and promote effective partnerships between stakeholders, users and providers.

21. Comprising 23 members, most of which are space agencies, and 21 associates, which are associated national and international organizations, the Committee on Earth Observation Satellites (CEOS) is the major international forum for the coordination of Earth observation satellite programmes and for the interaction of these programmes with users of satellite data worldwide. The individual members of CEOS are committed to using their best efforts to implement CEOS recommendations in their respective Earth observation programmes.

22. In a statement made to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the chairman of CEOS underlined the commitment of CEOS to assisting in raising awareness of the value of Earth observation satellite data and equipping developing countries with the knowledge necessary to benefit from key applications. The statement also referred to specific initiatives taken in this regard by CEOS members and associates. CEOS launched a "WSSD Follow-up Programme" in November 2002 as a demonstration of its continuing commitment to sustainable development.

D. Non-governmental organizations

23. The importance of the contribution of civil society, including non-governmental organizations and the private sector, to the implementation of conference outcomes is widely recognized and has recently been underlined by the General Assembly in its resolution 57/270 B of 23 June 2003 on integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic and social fields. Non-governmental organizations have traditionally been very active within the space community. They made a vital contribution to UNISPACE III, the first United Nations conference in which industry and civil society took part in partnership with governments. The participation of non-governmental organizations in the meetings of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and its Subcommittees forms part of a continuous process of opening up the Committee to include relevant non-governmental actors in order to increase global awareness of the importance and benefits of peaceful space activities and promote the peaceful uses of outer space.

24. Some of the non-governmental organizations, such as the International Society for Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing (ISPRS), combine long-standing expertise with a global and substantial membership. The ISPRS network comprises societies and associations from more than 120 countries around the world, representing approximately 50,000 professionals that undertake activities in the photogrammetry, remote sensing and spatial information sciences. ISPRS holds a quadrennial congress, as well as symposiums, workshops and tutorials, on a regular basis in

many parts of the world. Several of these events have laid particular emphasis on issues concerning space applications and sustainable development and make valuable contributions in this respect.

25. Similarly, the Spaceweek International Association, supports the United Nations in the global coordination of World Space Week, which was declared by the General Assembly in its resolution 54/68. The Association recruits and supports a worldwide network of coordinators and participants for World Space Week. The objective of World Space Week, which is celebrated yearly from 4 to 10 October, is to increase awareness among decision makers and the public at large of the benefits of the peaceful uses of space. The theme selected for 2004 is "Space for Sustainable Development". All World Space Week participants and supporters have been requested to plan corresponding programmes that address this theme, to incorporate the theme into their World Space Week publicity materials and to inform other organizations about the theme and encourage them to address it as well.

26. The issue of enhancing awareness regarding the role of space activities in supporting internationally agreed development goals is also addressed by other non-governmental organizations attending the meetings of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space as observers, such as the European International Space Year Association, the International Astronautical Federation and the Space Generation Advisory Council.

IV. Potential outreach activities

27. Promoting awareness among decision makers and the general public of the importance of space activities for peaceful purposes is not an end in itself. From the perspective of the United Nations, there are clear priorities regarding the efforts to be made in this respect, taking into account the aims and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the need for the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic and social fields, as set out by the General Assembly in its resolution 57/270 B.

28. The internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration, and the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits provide a comprehensive basis for action at the national, regional and international levels with the key objectives of poverty eradication, sustained economic growth and sustainable development. They also provide a valuable base for potential outreach activities aimed at increasing awareness among decision makers and the general public of the importance of space activities for peaceful purposes to improve the common economic and social welfare of humanity.

V. Recommendations

29. The Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space should assess efforts, including its own, aimed at promoting awareness of the importance of space activities, while taking measures to achieve the internationally agreed development goals and taking into particular account the Millennium Development Goals, the

Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development and the Plan of Action adopted by the World Summit on the Information Society, as well as their correlations to the recommendations contained in the Vienna Declaration on Space and Human Development.

30. Major United Nations conferences, as well as activities related to the implementation and follow-up to their outcomes, should continue to consider the contributions of space science and technology to a greater extent, taking into particular account the needs of developing countries. The Committee should continue to consider providing possible specific contributions to that end, including contributions to the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society.

31. In addressing the priority of raising awareness among policy planners and decision makers, involving all sectors at all levels of decision-making, the Committee and its Subcommittees should emphasize the possibility of taking regional approaches. Such approaches might involve, in particular, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Economic Commission for Africa and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, taking into account the example of the Regional Space Applications Programme for Sustainable Development of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

32. The Committee and its member States should draw the attention of international and national space organizations to the role of space technology in support of achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, and the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits. The Committee and its member States should also encourage international and national organizations, including both governmental and non-governmental organizations, to promote awareness in this respect and to provide the Committee with information on their respective outreach activities.

33. Building on the results of the Internet-based survey conducted by the Action Team among the member States and organizations having observer status with the Committee on their efforts to increase awareness of the importance of space activities, information on awareness-raising efforts should be made available electronically through the home page of the Office for Outer Space Affairs (www.oosa.unvienna.org). The information on the home page of the Office should continue to be updated.

Notes

[1] See *Report of the United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, Vienna, 19-30 July 1999* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.00.I.3), chap. I, resolution 1.