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Item 14 of the provisional agenda*

Other matters

Future role and activities of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space**

Working paper prepared by the Secretariat

I. Introduction

1. At the forty-eighth session of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, held from 8 to 17 June 2005, the Chairman of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee for the period 2001-2003, Mr. Karl Doetsch (Canada), made a special presentation entitled "Observations on activity of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space". On the basis of that presentation, the Chairman of the Committee for the period 2004-2005, Mr. Adigun Ade Abiodun (Nigeria), prepared an informal paper entitled "Planning for future roles and activities of the Committee", for consideration by the Committee.

2. On the basis of discussions during the session on the content of the informal paper, the Committee agreed that it was important to consider the evolution of space activities and to consider how the Committee could develop a long-term plan to enhance international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space.¹

* A/AC.105/L.263.

** This document was not submitted within the period required by the 10-week rule because of informal consultations during and following the forty-fifth session of the Legal Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, held from 3 to 13 April 2006.

¹ The views of member States during the forty-eighth session on future role and activities of the Committee are reflected in verbatim transcripts of the Committee (COPUOS/T.536, COPUOS/T.538 and COPUOS/T.547-549).



3. The Committee requested the Office for Outer Space Affairs of the Secretariat to prepare a working paper, taking into account the Chairman's informal paper and giving due regard to the views expressed by representatives at that session of the Committee, for consideration at its forty-ninth session, in 2006.² The present document has been prepared by the Secretariat in response to that request.

II. Background

A. Presentation by the Chairman of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee for the period 2001-2003

4. During his presentation to the Committee, the Chairman of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee for the period 2001-2003 provided his perspective on the motivation for the establishment of the Committee and its Scientific and Technical Subcommittee and its Legal Subcommittee, their achievements and the need for the Committee to consider what its future goals should be. In particular he noted that, since the establishment of the Committee in 1959:

(a) The motivation for space activity had changed and participation in it by new stakeholders had broadened considerably;

(b) The full potential of space to help solve global problems was only presently becoming broadly recognized inside and outside the space community;

(c) Space activity had led to an unprecedented increase in knowledge about the Universe, the solar system and the Earth through the information gathered by satellites, observatories and space probes;

(d) The two aspects of using space to "leave planet Earth" and to support "living on planet Earth" had evolved simultaneously and steadily in the past half century;

(e) Space had become an integral part of modern security systems, both military and civilian, and the foundations of today's broad range of space applications on Earth in the areas of meteorology, communications, navigation systems and Earth observation had been successfully established.

5. He noted that the United Nations had played an important role in that transformation to broader participation and application, by providing, through the Committee and its subcommittees and its various specialized agencies, a unique forum for exchange of information and effective encouragement for cooperation, including the stimulation and endorsement of some specific projects, the encouragement of space applications on Earth and the development of international treaties and principles to provide a framework for the orderly conduct of space activities.

6. The emergence of alternative mechanisms for information exchange, coordination and international programme development had, in his view, gradually decreased some of the need to use the Committee to discuss new international space

² *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixtieth Session, Supplement No. 20* and corrigendum (A/60/20 and Corr.1), paras. 316-317.

programmes or to serve as the prime stimulus for international space programme application and information exchange. In addition, strong budgetary constraints appeared to set a limit on the influence of deliberations of the Committee on the direction of the world's space programmes.

7. On the other hand, he noted that there continued to be enormous scope for internationally coordinated space programmes involving public, public-private or private partnerships that centred on the use of space applications to address the problems generally recognized by world leaders as being of great significance to the world community, such as the environment, sustainability, the digital divide and reducing and managing the effects of natural and human-caused disasters.

8. He also noted that in the future it would not be enough to restrict attention to space applications on Earth. The future also had a component in space and it was that component that would capture the attention of future generations, not only because of the desire to explore, but more importantly, because of the significance of the role that extraterrestrial resources would eventually play in life on Earth.

9. In his view, as the role that space assets and international cooperation would ultimately play in sustaining life on Earth lay at the heart of the establishment of the Committee and its subcommittees, the future direction of the Committee might best be addressed by establishing a framework that would enunciate specific objectives linked to the economic and social goals set by world leaders to address current world problems, the identification of space goals linked to the anticipated evolution of the world during the next 50 years and the role that the Committee could play in reaching those goals.

10. In the course of the discussion that followed his presentation, the Chairman of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee explained that the establishment of a long-term planning group to consider the mandate and goals of the Committee would aim at finding a mechanism to address the issue that space activities were not yet fully recognized to be part of the toolset available to political leaders to help solve global issues in the civil domain. The Committee could be instrumental in changing that perception and could also serve as an effective catalyst for the broader application of space activity. He believed that, in order to achieve that, the Committee would have to reflect deeply on the situation existing both on the global stage and in emerging space activities in the civil and commercial sectors to enable the development of an influential coherent approach.

B. Non-paper presented by the Chairman of the Committee for the period 2004-2005

11. On the basis of the presentation by the Chairman of the Subcommittee for the period 2001-2003, the Chairman of the Committee for the period 2004-2005 developed, for consideration by the Committee, a non-paper entitled "Planning for future roles and activities of the Committee", in which he noted the following:

(a) There had been profound changes in the products and organization of the world's space sector and in the users and uses of space applications since 1959;

(b) Six years had elapsed since the holding in 1999 of the Third United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space

(UNISPACE III), which had provided the last major review of the Committee's priorities and activities and which had focused mainly on space applications on Earth and not on the entire mandate of the Committee;

(c) There were important elements in space exploration that would benefit from the attention of the Committee;

(d) There was no multi-year plan in place to prioritize and guide the Committee's activity;

(e) The increasing availability to the space sector and the related sector of alternative forums and the widespread use of new and pervasive information technologies suggested that a review was needed of how the Committee could best conduct its business.

12. For those reasons, the Chairman of the Committee proposed to establish an ad hoc working group, consisting of about 15 members with the necessary expertise and appropriate regional and organizational representation, to undertake the following tasks:

(a) To review and make such proposals for modification to the mandate of the Committee as may be necessary to properly reflect the Committee's desired role in advancing current and future international space activities;

(b) To develop a five-year plan for the Committee's activities, taking full account of the opportunities that currently existed and would increasingly exist in future, in the areas of space applications and space exploration;

(c) To consider ways and means of enhancing partnership with governmental and non-governmental entities necessary to effectively implement the proposed activities;

(d) To consider ways and means of developing the necessary outreach to increase the demand for space activity and resources among potential users.

C. Consideration by the Committee of the presentation made by the Chairman of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee for the period 2001-2003 and the non-paper presented by the Chairman of the Committee for the period 2004-2005

13. Under its agenda item entitled "Other matters", the Committee considered the presentation made by the Chairman of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee for the period 2001-2003 and the non-paper presented by the Chairman of the Committee for the period 2004-2005.

14. Some delegations expressed the view that the idea of having a long-term planning and vision for long-term commitment for space and policy was important to the work of the Committee and that it therefore was reasonable to set up a working group dealing with the future plans of the Committee. Those delegations were of the view that there was a need to review the activities of the Committee against the conditions prevalent in the space industry and other space communities. If the Committee was to remain relevant in the twenty-first century, it must take account of the rapid pace of change in the space arena.

15. Some delegations expressed the view that the reason for setting up such a working group was not clear and that the current work of the two subcommittees offered appropriate possibilities for regional groups to discuss the future work of the Committee. While not objecting to consider the long-term vision of the work of the Committee, those delegations were of the view that such a vision needed to be studied in depth, particularly the practical ways of how to proceed.

16. The view was expressed that the concept of forward-looking activity in the Committee was important but that such activity should not give the impression that the Committee was not relevant and had not adjusted its activities throughout the years to the realities and activities of the larger space community.

17. The view was expressed that the Committee, during its existence, had changed its work in response to global changes. That delegation noted that three UNISPACE conferences had been held that had taken into account those global changes and that the focus of the Committee should be on how to implement the recommendations of the last of those conferences, UNISPACE III. Such an approach would strengthen the work being conducted by the Committee. That delegation was of the view that all relevant factors should be taken into consideration before the Committee made any decision with regard to setting up the proposed working group. Thus, for the time being, the proper time had not come to set up such a working group.

18. The view was expressed that a profound and detailed discussion was necessary before setting up the proposed working group, taking into account the importance of retaining and preserving national sovereignty in the conduct of space activities in any vision for the future. That delegation was of the view that there were other entities, tools, and other ways of shaping that long-term vision.

19. The view was expressed that the implementation of the Plan of Action of UNISPACE III (A/59/174, sect. VI.B), endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 59/2 of 20 October 2004, should be prioritized. That delegation was of the view that the proposed working group could therefore involve the participation of action teams.

20. The view was expressed that the subcommittees had thus far proceeded quite independently and separately and it was therefore necessary to note in what direction, for example, the Committee and the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee should head with regard to science and technology and the direction that the Legal Subcommittee should take as regards its reaction to the development of science and technology. That delegation was of the view that the work of the proposed working group could be useful in that context.

21. The view was expressed that the paper to be prepared by the Secretariat should not discuss changes or modifications to the mandate of the Committee since there was no consensus on that element.

III. Future role and activities of the Committee

22. In preparing the present document, the Secretariat took into account the presentation made by the Chairman of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee for the period 2001-2003, the non-paper presented by the Chairman of the

Committee for the period 2004-2005 and the views expressed by representatives of member States during the forty-eighth session of the Committee.

23. The overall purpose of the United Nations programme on the peaceful uses of outer space is the promotion of international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space for economic, social and scientific development, in particular for the benefit of developing countries. The programme evolved as a result of the recognition, by the General Assembly in its resolution 1348 (XIII) of 13 December 1958, of the importance of using outer space exclusively for peaceful purposes and of the need to promote international cooperation in the conduct of space activities. The legislative authority and direction of the programme are drawn from relevant General Assembly resolutions, the decisions of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, which was established in 1959 by General Assembly resolution 1472 A (XIV) of 12 December 1959, and of its Legal Subcommittee and its Scientific and Technical Subcommittee and their subsidiary bodies. Recommendations of particular relevance for the work to be undertaken under this programme are contained in the resolution entitled “The Space Millennium: Vienna Declaration on Space and Human Development”,³ adopted by UNISPACE III and endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 54/68 of 6 December 1999.

24. At its forty-second session, in 1999, immediately preceding UNISPACE III, the Committee revised the structure of the agendas of its subcommittees. The revised structure enabled the subcommittees to introduce new agenda items either under multi-year work plans, with objectives to be achieved within a fixed period of time, or as single issues or items for discussion, to be considered for one session only. That agreement reached by the Committee resulted in a revitalization of the work of those bodies and a strengthening of their role in promoting international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space.

25. In 2004, the General Assembly, in its resolution 59/2, having considered the report of the Committee on the review of the implementation of the recommendations of UNISPACE III, endorsed the Plan of Action as proposed by the Committee in its report (A/59/174, sect. VI.B).

26. During its review of the implementation of the recommendations of UNISPACE III, the Committee considered the background to UNISPACE III, its unique organizational aspects, which included the participation of space industry and of young people, and its results. The Committee considered different mechanisms for implementing the recommendations of UNISPACE III, including the plan of action of the Office for Outer Space Affairs and national mechanisms, and reviewed progress made in the implementation of the recommendations of UNISPACE III by the Committee and its subsidiary bodies, progress achieved through national and regional efforts, and activities of entities of the United Nations system and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. To maximize the effectiveness of its resources, in implementing the recommendations of UNISPACE III, the Committee adopted a flexible and unique mechanism by establishing action teams that took advantage of partnerships established between its

³ *Report of the Third 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.

secretariat, Member States, intergovernmental organizations and international non-governmental organizations.

27. The Committee also considered the achievements of the Committee and its subcommittees following the introduction of their revised agenda structures and noted that the mechanism facilitated the consideration by the Committee of the 33 specific actions contained in the Vienna Declaration that addressed global challenges.

28. The report of the Committee (A/59/174) provides a road map for the further development of space capabilities to advance human development, in making space tools more widely available by moving from the demonstration of the usefulness of space technology to a more broadly based operational use of space-based services.

29. The Plan of Action, contained in that report, constitutes a long-term strategy for enhancing mechanisms at the national, regional and global levels in developing and strengthening the use of space science and technology and their applications to support overarching global agendas for sustainable development; developing coordinated, global space capabilities; supporting specific agendas to meet human development needs at the global level; and supporting overarching capacity development.

30. The Committee, in the report (A/59/174, para. 227), noted that in implementing the Plan of Action, it could provide a bridge between users and potential providers of space-based development and services by identifying needs of Member States and coordinating international cooperation to facilitate access to the scientific and technical systems that might meet them, while observing the interaction between different stakeholders in the future implementation of the strategy and building upon the respective roles and needs of actors involved in the wider space community.

31. The overall plan of the Committee under the programme on the peaceful uses of outer space aims at strengthening the international legal regime governing outer space, resulting in improved conditions for expanding international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space, and supporting efforts at the national, regional and global levels, including those of entities of the United Nations system and international space-related entities, to maximize the benefits of the use of space science and technology and their applications.

32. One central element of the work of the Committee is to further increase coherence and synergy in the space-related work of entities of the United Nations system and international space-related entities in using space science and technology and their applications as tools to advance human development and increase overall capacity development, including through increased coordination within the Inter-Agency Meeting on Outer Space Activities, increased interaction with international space-related entities and increased synergy between the work of the Committee and the Commission on Sustainable Development.

33. Another central element is to further strengthen capacity, particularly of developing countries, in the use and applications of space science and technology for sustainable development and increasing awareness of decision makers of the benefits of space science and technology and their applications to address societal needs for sustainable development through international cooperation among

Member States and national and international space-related entities, including the private sector as appropriate.

34. In its continued deliberations on the proposed long-term planning for future role and activities of the Committee, the information provided in this document could be taken into account by the Committee in considering the strengthening of the continued role of the Committee in advancing international cooperation and coordination of space activities.
