



**PRESS HAND-OUT**  
**20 February 2013**

**Recommendations of the Action Team on Near-Earth Objects for an international response to the near-Earth object impact threat**

**Introduction**

Given the global consequences of a NEO impact and the enormous resources required to prevent a collision, the UN has been seen as the forum to coordinate such efforts. In 1995, the United Nations International Conference on Near Earth Objects was held at UN Headquarters in New York. The Conference, organized by United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA), sensitised Member States to the potential threat of NEOs and proposed an expansion of existing observation campaigns to detect and track NEOs.

**The Action Team on Near-Earth Objects (Action Team 14)** was established in 2001 by the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS), in response to recommendation 14 of the Third United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNISPACE III) that was held in Vienna in 1999, to improve international coordination of activities related to near-Earth objects. Sergio Camacho, a former UNOOSA Director currently serves as the Chair of AT-14.

The Action Team has been mandated to:

- (a) Review the content, structure and organization of ongoing efforts in the field of near-Earth objects (NEOs);
- (b) Identify any gaps in the ongoing work where additional coordination is required and/or where other countries or organizations could make contributions;
- (c) Propose steps for the improvement of international coordination in collaboration with specialized bodies.

The Action Team based its recommendations on the fact that many expert groups and assets needed for this issue already exist. It recommends the formation of a warning network and two advisory groups: an International Asteroid Warning Network (IAWN), a Space Missions Planning Advisory Group (SMPAG - pronounce 'same page'), and an Impact Disaster Planning Advisory Group (IDPAG).

**The warning network**

The IAWN would be a network of experts which would focus on discovery, tracking, and the observation of NEOs. The goal would be to find objects as early as possible. Observations are processed and orbit predictions and any potential impact warnings are generated. The IAWN would also prepare public communications. In case of a credible impact threat, IAWN would ensure that more information on these objects is gathered expeditiously. IAWN would then also inform COPUOS and the Office of



## UNITED NATIONS Office for Outer Space Affairs

Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA). The IAWN would consist of observers, astrodynamics experts, experts working on the characterization of asteroids and modelling. No formal 'group' is needed, it is a network of existing experts and assets. A steering group is proposed as a focus point for the IAWN. COPUOS would receive yearly summary reports from the IAWN.

### **The advisory groups**

The IDPAG would have as tasks to review lessons learned from other large-scale disasters, prepare coordinated response plans and exercises to address both predicted and unpredicted impact disasters. It would recommend and promote research related to the topic. It would develop representative timelines and procedures for evacuations. It is proposed that the IDPAG is formed by representatives of existing national and international disaster response agencies. Its organisation would be initiated by the IAWN and could be coordinated with other relevant international and national entities (e.g. UN-SPIDER, UN-ISDR, OCHA)<sup>1</sup>.

The SMPAG would combine the expertise of space-faring nations. It would recommend and promote mitigation mission-related research and studies on an international and cooperative level. It would develop and adopt a set of reference missions. It would develop technical concepts and propose operational setups. It would also develop applicable decision criteria and timelines. The SMPAG would be a group of voluntary representatives of space-faring nations. The group would call on support by technical experts and other relevant entities as needed. It would provide a yearly summary report to COPUOS.

### **Response to a credible impact threat**

In the case of an actual credible impact threat, the IAWN would provide all available information and updates to COPUOS through the UN Office of Outer Space Affairs. The IDPAG would work with disaster response groups in nations that would be affected to prepare and coordinate civil protection plans. The SMPAG would coordinate the space mission planning among space-capable nations. It is suggested that COPUOS may choose to appoint an ad-hoc mitigation advisory group to work together with the response teams.

---

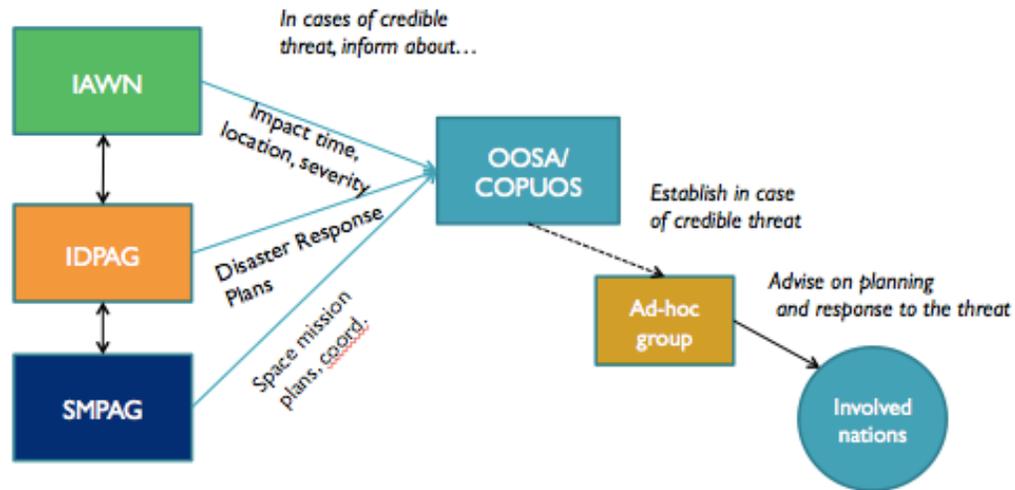
<sup>1</sup> UN-SPIDER: The United Nations Platform for Space-based Information for Disaster Management and Emergency Response (UN-SPIDER) is a programme of the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA).

UN-ISDR: The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

OCHA: Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs



The graphics below summarizes the complete process.



## Status

Currently, the Working Group on Near-Earth Objects of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee is discussing the issue. Once it is approved by the Working Group, the proposal will be before the Subcommittee, and the main Committee (COPUS) that will be in session 12 to 20 June 2013. COPUOS reports to the Fourth Committee of the UN General Assembly.

Status of proposed groups: A first teleconference to establish the IAWN steering group has taken place in fall 2012. Two preparatory meetings for the formation of the SMPAG have taken place in the margins of the STSC and COPUOS meetings in February and June 2012. The Terms of Reference have been discussed by the potential members. A third preparatory meeting is foreseen for June 2013. It should lead to the first official meeting of the group itself within the timeframe of one year.