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COMMITTEE ON THE PEACEFUL USES  
OF OUTER SPACE

Legal Sub-Committee

Registration with the United Nations  
of Objects launched into Outer Space <sup>1/</sup>

Mr. Chairman,

The registration with the United Nations of objects launched into outer space has been frequently referred to in the current debate. It might be useful to make a brief statement on the history of this question and on the information already furnished by the Launching States and disseminated by the United Nations.

The question of registration was raised in the United Nations for the first time in 1959, that is some considerable time after the launching of Sputnik I by the USSR in October 1957 and Alpha I by the United States in February 1958. There was no reference to the question of registration in the first two resolutions adopted by the General Assembly on the question of the peaceful uses of outer space, namely resolution 1348 (XIII) adopted in 1958 and resolution 1472 (XIV) adopted in 1959. The question was taken up in the first instance by the Ad Hoc Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space in its session ten years ago, in May and June 1959. The report of the Ad Hoc Committee<sup>2/</sup> stated the following regarding the necessity of identification and registration of space vehicles:

<sup>1/</sup> The statement was delivered by Mr. A.J. Abdel-Ghani, Chief of the Outer Space Affairs Division of the United Nations Secretariat, at the eighth session of the Legal Sub-Committee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, in connexion with the consideration of the Draft Convention proposed by France concerning "the registration of objects launched into space for the exploration and use of outer space" (Doc. A/AC.105/45 Annexe II). The Sub-Committee agreed to the request of the Delegation of Czechoslovakia to issue the statement as a Sub-Committee document.

<sup>2/</sup> Doc. A/4141

"It is expected that the number of space vehicles will progressively increase and in the course of time that number may become very large. This indicates the necessity of providing suitable means for identifying individual space vehicles. Such identification of space vehicles could be obtained by agreement on an allocation of individual call signs to these vehicles. The call signs could be emitted at stipulated regular intervals, at least until identification by other means has been established."

The report of the Ad Hoc Committee further referred to the fact that as a part of the problem of identification there arises the question of putting suitable markings on space vehicles so that, particularly in the event of their return to earth, they may be readily identified. The reasons given in the report for the desirability of maintaining a form of identification and registration may be summarized as follows:

1. In many cases it will be desirable to have several nations co-operate in the tracking of a space vehicle.
2. It might also afford a convenient means for the notification of launchings to other States, thus enabling them to make appropriate distinctions between space vehicles so notified and other objects and to take appropriate measures to protect their interests, if necessary.
3. It also could be useful in preventing physical interferences between space vehicles and conventional aircraft.
4. Such identification would be useful where equipment is recovered from space vehicles which had re-entered the earth's atmosphere or where the question of liability arises in connexion with possible damage caused upon re-entry.

The General Assembly later took up this question in its resolution 1721 (XVI) adopted in 1961. The two relevant provisions in this resolution read as follows:

"The General Assembly,

1. Calls upon States launching objects into orbit or beyond to furnish information promptly to the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space through the Secretary-General for the registration of launchings.
2. Requests the Secretary-General to maintain a public registry of the information furnished in accordance with paragraph 1 above."

In accordance with this resolution the States launching objects into outer space or beyond have been submitting to the Secretary-General information on such launchings. This information embodies a census of the names of satellites or space objects or any other designation as well as orbital parameters. For this purpose a public registry was established and is maintained by the Secretary-General. On receiving such information, the Secretary-General issues it in an information series under the symbol A/AC.105/INF. circulated on a general basis and the original copy is retained in the Outer Space Affairs Division. To this date the USA, USSR, Italy, France and Australia have submitted notifications of launchings. The first document in the series of information is dated 7 March 1962 and the last document issued is dated 6 June 1969. A set of the documents received and disseminated by the United Nations under the said symbol is also available to the members of the Sub-Committee for reference.

The information furnished by the launching States is not identical in form and contents. The United States, for example, supplied information on the object launched by them as well as information on decaying satellites. The designation of objects follows that established by COSPAR as an international designation. Information was provided on the date of launching, the launched vehicle, the apogee, the perigee and other technical information. It also contains what is called the Satellite Category and this category is divided into four categories - (a) development of space flight techniques and technology; (b) space research and exploration; (c) practical applications of space technology; and (d) non-functional objects.

The USSR have submitted information on USSR launchings in chronological order using code or popular names for payloads, e.g. Cosmos 188, Molinya I, Zond 6, and so on. It contains information on the date of launching, the perigee and the apogee as well as the purpose of launching such as for investigation of the upper atmosphere and outer space research for biology, meteorology, and so on.

The French Government in submitting information on their launchings used the International designation of COSPAR as well as code names, e.g. France I. The Italian Government used the code names San Marco I and San Marco II. The Australian Government used the code name WRESAT.

In resolutions adopted since the establishment of the "Registry", the General Assembly "Noted with appreciation that, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1721 B (XVI), the Secretary-General continues to maintain a public registry of objects launched into orbit or beyond on basis of information being furnished by Member States."



The United Nations is not the only organization engaged in the registration of launchings. There are other organizations which gather and disseminate information on this matter. Under the programme of the International Geophysical Year, three world data centres were established. These are World Data Centre A in the USA, World Data Centre B in the USSR and World Data Centre C in Britain. These were established to collect data from numerous observational programmes and to make such data accessible to interested scientists and organizations. In this connexion COSPAR has set up a "Guide to Rocket and Satellite Information and Data Exchange".

The NASA's Goddard Space Flight Centre issues periodical reports reflecting data computed and compiled by the Smithsonian Astro-Physical Observatory. Another example is the Royal Aircraft Establishment in the United Kingdom, which also is concerned with collecting information on the various launchings. Some specialized magazine periodic publications collect and publish information on launchings.

The system of registration with the United Nations has been a subject of comment by several Member States on the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and in particular in this Legal Sub-Committee. These comments were made on several occasions and in particular on the occasion of the consideration by the Legal Sub-Committee of the Convention on Assistance and Return and in the current consideration on the Draft Convention on Liability. Of course, I do not need to go into this question as the distinguished delegates are fully aware of the comments made during the previous sessions of the Sub-Committee and recorded in its summary records.

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