

United. States of America
Agenda Item 6: “Ways and Means of Maintaining Outer Space for Peaceful Purposes”
United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space
62nd Session, Vienna
June 2, 2022

Mister Chair,

For nearly four decades, this agenda item has allowed for the constructive exchange of views on how the work of this Committee, its subcommittees, and the UN Office of Outer Space Affairs can contribute to discussions on space security activities in other United Nations fora pursuant to their respective legislative mandates.

The generally positive nature of exchanges on space security in disarmament fora recently convened in New York and Geneva reinforces my delegation’s long-standing view that the work of this Committee in Vienna can and must continue to retain its focus on its established mandate. This mandate for this Committee includes the advancement of voluntary, non-legally binding principles and guidelines for the full range of governmental and non-governmental space activities conducted for peaceful purposes and for the benefit of all humanity.

In particular, the Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines and Guidelines for the Long-Term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities, adopted by this Committee in 2007 and 2019, continue to serve as cornerstones for protecting the space environment and advancing key principles of international cooperation in the peaceful uses of space. As the United States and many other delegations have noted at this Committee and its subcommittees, it is essential that all nations fully implement these commitments and ensure their governmental, commercial, and other private sector activities are conducted in accordance with both the letter and spirit of these guidelines which were adopted by consensus in this committee.

The United States recognizes that progress in this Committee, as well as in other UN fora, can help advance international cooperation in the responsible, peaceful, and sustainable exploration and use of outer space.

As space activities evolve, the norms, rules, and principles that guide outer space activities also must evolve. As a result, the United States Space Priorities Framework, adopted on December 1, 2021, gives priority to strengthening the global governance of space activities, including efforts to uphold and strengthen a rules-based international order for space.

Mr. Chair, the United States recognizes there are complementary aspects of discussions in this Committee on space sustainability and in disarmament fora on national security-related space activities. Although time does not permit a detailed discussion of these complementary aspects today, it is worth noting that the U.S. Space Priorities Framework specifically states that “U.S. national security space activities will demonstrate leadership in both the responsible use of space and stewardship of the space environment.”

To further underscore the U.S. commitment to the responsible use of space, Vice President Kamala Harris announced on April 18, 2022, that the United States commits not to conduct destructive direct-ascent anti-satellite missile testing. As she said, such tests “put in danger so much of what we do in space....This debris presents a risk to the safety of our astronauts, our satellites, and our growing commercial presence.”

In addition to calling on all nations to make a similar commitment, the United States continues to participate actively in discussions on security-related transparency and confidence building measures (TCBMs) for outer space activities in the Conference on Disarmament and the UN Disarmament Commission (UNDC). Although these forums are security-related, their complementary efforts will contribute to the ongoing peaceful exploration and use of outer space. In particular, the United States thanks Ms. Szilvia Balazs of Hungary, Chair of the Disarmament Commission’s Working Group on Outer Space, for her leadership in productive discussions on the practical implementation of space TCBMs at the UNDC’s 2022 substantive session. We look forward to further work by the Commission on this important topic in 2023.

The United States also will continue to take an active role in the Open Ended Working Group on “Reducing Space Threats on Norms, Rules and Principles of Responsible Behavior” established pursuant to UN General Assembly resolution 76/231. The United States thanks Mr. Helmut Lagos of Chile for his leadership at the working group’s first meeting in May, which laid a solid basis for further working group meetings this September and at two sessions in 2023 in order to create shared understandings on space threats and consider potential TCBMs to reduce the risk of misperception, misunderstanding, and miscalculation.

Looking ahead, the United States looks forward to participating in the fourth joint panel discussion of the General Assembly’s First and Fourth Committees on possible challenges to space security and sustainability. Inputs provided by COPUOS to the joint panel discussion at the General Assembly’s 77th session can help promote the implementation of existing measures and advance the development of new measures that contribute to the safety, stability, security, and long-term sustainability of space activities. The joint panel discussion can also advance planning for a multi-stakeholder dialogue on space the Secretary General has proposed to convene as part of the Summit of the Future during the General Assembly’s 78th session.