

Canada Statement
Agenda Item 6 – Ways and means of maintaining outer space for peaceful purposes.
Delivered by: Ashlyn Milligan, Global Affairs Canada

Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space
Sixty-seventh session, Vienna, 19 – 28 June, 2024

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Maintaining outer space for peaceful purposes is an issue that is of paramount importance. As we continue to increase our reliance on space-based services for the functioning of our societies, it becomes evermore critical to ensure that we maintain a secure, safe, and sustainable space environment. This is a global effort and the responsibility of all States, underpinned by a robust multilateral system with the UN at its core.

As the peaceful exploration and the use of outer space enters an exciting phase involving new frontiers and new activities, we must all remember that outer space is not lawless. International law, including the Charter of the United Nations and international humanitarian law, applies to outer space activities. It is also thanks to the legal framework established by the core space treaties through COPUOS that humanity has been able to successfully use and explore outer space for the benefit – and in the interests – of all countries.

Indeed, Canada believes that we already have the most essential tools at our disposal to ensure the preservation of outer space for peaceful purposes. In particular, Canada cannot over emphasize the importance of the Outer Space Treaty, signed by 115 states, and which has served a core role in keeping space safe and secure for more than half a century. And while not a disarmament instrument, it contains a critical provision that seeks to prevent the most destructive and destabilizing activity in outer space. Article IV explicitly prohibits the placement in orbit of “*objects carrying nuclear weapons or any other kinds of weapons of mass destruction.*” Ensuring that any conflict on Earth does not extend into outer space, and preventing an arms race in outer space, begins with the universalization and strict adherence to the current international legal framework. Without this, it is difficult to build the environment of trust needed to maintain space for peaceful purposes.

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It is also for this reason that Canada regrets the veto earlier this year of a UN Security Council resolution that was focused on reaffirming this important principle of international law. This resolution, led by the U.S. and Japan, garnered significant support with 65 co-sponsors. Canada was pleased to count itself among those supporters.

Mr. Chair,

While the work of COPUOS focuses on the preservation of outer space for peaceful purposes, Canada believes that work undertaken in other multilateral fora to enhance space security complements and augments the important work done at COPUOS. For instance, transparency and confidence building measures that seek to enhance communication and improve information sharing are particularly helpful at reducing misperceptions and miscalculations. This becomes especially important during times of heightened tensions. Ways to enhance information exchange and promote transparency can be done through tools such as the registration of space objects with the UN and advance notification of launches in accordance with The Hague Code of Conduct.

Norms of responsible behaviour can also contribute greatly to the preservation of a sustainable and peaceful space environment. It is why Canada continues to support efforts to reduce space threats through norms, rules, and principles of responsible behaviour, and we look forward to the start of next year's Open Ended Working Group that will aim to further develop and refine this work, and which is essential to building a foundation of mutual trust and understanding amongst states. From Canada's perspective, pragmatic, non-binding standards of responsible behaviours, if accepted by a majority of nations, could become legally binding international law in the future.

Canada also welcomes the Summit of the Future taking place later this year, which aims to address emerging challenges and foster a more resilient global

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community for future generations. Space will be integral to this process, and we welcome the Secretary-General's effort to develop a Pact of the Future that amplifies some of the key emerging trends and challenges to governance that the global community is facing in the space environment. Canada believes these efforts, with COPUOS at the centre of space governance, will be critical to advancing the key theme of preserving space for peaceful purposes.

Mr. Chair,

Canada is unequivocal and unwavering in its support for the peaceful uses of outer space, and we will continue to devote our efforts to ensuring the long-term sustainability and preservation of the space environment for the benefit of all humanity, for generations to come.

Thank you.