

COPUOS 2024

**Agenda Item 6: Ways and Means of Maintaining Space for Peaceful Purposes
UK Statement (533)**

Mr Chair,

The human population relies on space more and more every day. Space-related services and data are crucial to the functioning of our economies, societies, citizen welfare, weather forecasting, crisis response, global security, and our daily way of life.

Advances in modern technology are enabling novel space activities, such as in-orbit servicing, active debris removal, and improving our Position, Navigation and Timing capabilities. As the number of users relying on space services grows, so does the number of satellites placed in orbit.

The space domain is becoming increasingly congested and cluttered as a result.

COPUOS plays a vital role in ensuring the space domain remains accessible to all and that everything we do in space is sustainable. Discussions happening in other UN fora also contribute to this goal. The UN General Assembly Resolution 77/41 which calls on states to commit to not conducting destructive direct ascent anti-satellite missile tests is an example of this, receiving overwhelming support from 155 States. There are many other ongoing efforts and conversations in the UN on space that complement and benefit the work of our committee.

Mr Chair,

Fundamental to maintaining space for peaceful purposes is that States comply with their obligations under the Outer Space Treaty and international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, which applies to all State activity in outer space.

The UK therefore supported the recent UN Security Council Resolution put forward by the US and Japan on Weapons of Mass Destruction in Outer Space, which sought to affirm the basic obligations of the Outer Space Treaty, and thus prevent any nuclear weapons being placed in Earth's orbit.

The detonation of a nuclear weapon in space could destroy or permanently damage a significant proportion of satellites in orbit, with highly disruptive and potentially life-threatening consequences. This would be contrary to the goals of COPUOS.

It should be deeply concerning to all of us that Russia vetoed that resolution. This is even more concerning alongside the reports of the Russian Federation developing a new satellite carrying a nuclear device, which, if placed in orbit, would clearly violate its obligations under the Outer Space Treaty and would be exceptionally dangerous and irresponsible.

Mr Chair,

We live in volatile times. There is an increasing risk that competition between States will spill over into conflict, including in space.

The UN General Assembly has a crucial role to play in reducing this risk by developing norms, rules and principles to reduce space threats and contribute to the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS). We encourage all States to engage with the UN Open Ended Working Group on Responsible Space Behaviours commencing in 2025.

COPUOS also has an important role to play through our work to develop and support implementation of the existing legal regime applicable to space and to promote cooperation and transparency in space activities for peaceful purposes. The COPUOS mission is highly relevant to PAROS and related work, through developing general standards and guidelines for safety and sustainability for space operations, making it easier to identify irresponsible or threatening behaviour.

The separate UN workstreams on space complement one another, and we should continue to ensure effective collaboration - within their respective mandates - between Vienna, Geneva and New York to maintain space for peaceful purposes.

Thank you, Mr Chair