

OPENING STATEMENT

MR. RAFIQ AKRAM

**Chair of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space
Sixty-eighth session
Vienna, 25 June - 2 July 2025**

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates and Representatives,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the sixty-eighth session of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. I am honoured to serve as its Chair. I thank you all for the confidence you have placed in me and assure you of my commitment to continue the successful work of the Committee.

Allow me to once again recognize the successful chairmanship of Mr. Sherif Sedky in 2024, and all what has been accomplished under his chairmanship leading up to this session.

Dear Sherif, during your chairmanship, the Committee made significant progress on several important matters, advancing international cooperation and governance of outer space activities. As the Chair for this session, I will strive to continue this successful path. I would also like to acknowledge the work of Hasan Abbas, as the Second Vice Chair and Rapporteur for 2024. I warmly welcome Ms. Hesa Al-Khalifa of Bahrain, to assume that function for 2025.

Distinguished delegates,

These are, indeed, unprecedented times, as we work under the shortened duration of this session in face of the liquidity crisis. As the Chair of the Committee, I would like to assure you of my utmost commitment to make much progress at this session, together with my distinguished colleagues in the bureau, Mr. Juan Francisco Facetti Fernandez of Paraguay and Ms. Hesa Al-Khalifa of Bahrain.

Taking into account international priorities, we will strive to strengthen international cooperation, promote compliance with UN treaties, resolutions and guidelines governing the safety and sustainability of outer space, promote fair and responsible access to space, and encourage knowledge transfer and exchange initiatives among Member States.

Distinguished delegates,

It is my great pleasure to welcome Djibouti and Latvia as the newest States members of the Committee. Its membership has now grown to 104 States. Furthermore, I would like to warmly welcome five new permanent observers, namely the African Astronomical Society, the Global Satellite Operators Association, the Outer Space Institute, the Space Data Association and Space Renaissance International, as the newest international organizations with permanent observer status with the Committee, which in total are now 56. I'm pleased to see the growing interest among Member States and international organizations in joining this Committee to contribute to its work to promote the peaceful, safe, and sustainable use and exploration of

outer space. It is encouraging to see the participation of high-ranking, senior officials in this session, including more than ten heads of space agencies.

The eyes of the world are on us as the unique intergovernmental platform for space cooperation. This Committee, with its Scientific and Technical and Legal Subcommittees, needs to demonstrate its ability to meet rising challenges and seize new opportunities. A rapid expansion of space activities and space actors, with an increasing number of objects in orbit, and emerging technologies, require us to advance our work progressively. This Committee has a crucial role to ensure that the exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes can continue to flourish, bringing benefits to all Member States.

Distinguished Delegates,

The deliberations at the commencement of the 79th session of the General Assembly in 2024 have reaffirmed the role of this Committee in discussing the establishment of new frameworks for space traffic, space debris and space resources.

We have important workstreams in place to deliver on these pertinent matters. The Working Group on the Long-term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee is at an important juncture in its work. The Working Group will meet during this session to make progress in finalizing its report.

The Working Group on the Legal Aspects of Space Resource Activities of the Legal Subcommittee has started to consider an initial draft set of recommended principles for space resource activities. Its work will continue during the intersessional period to further refine the draft by the next session of the Legal Subcommittee.

On the sidelines of the Legal Subcommittee's session, informal consultations among interested delegations took place on the proposal to establish a study group on the legal and policy aspects of space traffic. Building on those discussions, the proposal will be further considered during the current session of the Committee.

The Action Team on Lunar Activities Consultation, ATLAC, aims to support international dialogue on safe, peaceful, and transparent lunar activities. Co-chaired by Hasan Abbas of Pakistan and Ulpia Botezatu of Romania, ATLAC held a series of intersessional meetings to finalize its draft workplan, including an initial list of potential priority topics. It is encouraging to see that ATLAC now has around 100 members appointed by more than 30 member States. The Committee will have before it for its endorsement the draft workplan, to be finalized by ATLAC during this session.

In addition to those areas where the General Assembly expects the Committee to establish new frameworks through its workstreams in place, the Committee is to further consult on the proposal to hold a fourth United Nations Conference on the Peaceful Exploration and Use of Outer Space, or UNISPACE IV, in 2027. The year 2027 marks the sixtieth anniversary of the Outer Space Treaty, the cornerstone of the international space law. Based on the outcomes of a series of informal consultations and intersessional meetings, facilitated by Morocco and Italy, the Committee is expected to decide this year on the objectives, scope, organizational arrangements and financial aspects of UNISPACE IV.

Distinguished Delegates,

This year, in 2025, the Committee is to conduct its mid-term review of the implementation of “Space2030” Agenda: space as a driver of sustainable development. Space tools have become indispensable for viable long-term solutions for sustainable development and can contribute effectively to promote the development of all countries.

The Space2030 Agenda, adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 76/3, contains a long list of valuable tools and international and regional mechanisms, programmes, projects and platforms that enable countries around the world to leverage space technologies, applications and data to achieve economic growth and prosperity.

Final reporting to the General Assembly on the implementation of the Space2030 Agenda is envisaged for 2030. However, this year’s mid-term review provides a key opportunity to share valuable examples and experiences of using space solutions for development. It could also enable us to identify gaps between benefits offered by the existing space solutions and capacity-building needs. This review could result in identifying avenues for emerging and developing countries to further benefit from using space science, technology, and their applications.

Distinguished Delegates,

During this year’s session, the Legal Subcommittee noted the suggestion to add an item to its agenda concerning benefit-sharing to support developing countries. The delegations making that suggestion are expected to report to the Committee on the outcome of the informal consultations that they have held, open to all States members of the Committee.

Distinguished Delegates,

I would like to acknowledge the work of the two Subcommittees - the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee, and the Legal Subcommittee, and commend their Chairs, Ms. Ulpia-Elena Botezatu of Romania and Mr. Santiago Ripol Carulla of Spain, for their skilful leadership and guidance. Under the respective agenda items, we will hear their reports highlighting achievements of both Subcommittees this year.

Progress by those Subcommittees was possible also because of the untiring efforts by the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of their Working Groups. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Mr. Prakash Chauhan and Mr. Umamaheswaran R. of India, Mr. Leopold Summerer of Austria, Mr. Ian Grosner of Brazil, Ms. Franziska Knur of Germany, and Mr. Steven Freeland of Australia, for their excellent leadership. I welcome the appointment of Mr. Ayman Mahmoud Mohamed Ahmed of Egypt as the Vice-Chair of the Working Group on Legal Aspects of Space Resource Activities.

It is with my deep regret to note the passing of Mr. Andrzej Misztal of Poland. He served as Chair of the Legal Subcommittee as well as Chair of its Working Group on Legal Aspects of Space Resource Activities, making significant contributions to the work of this Committee over years.

Distinguished Delegates,

I would also like to note with appreciation the continuing work of the international mechanisms whose establishment was facilitated by this Committee, namely the International Committee on Global Navigation Satellite Systems (ICG), the Space and Global Health Network, the Space Mission Planning Advisory Group (SMPAG) and the International Asteroid Warning Network (IAWN).

During this year's session of the Committee, we will observe the International Asteroid Day, on 30 June. This special day was declared by the General Assembly in 2016 to observe each year the anniversary of the Tunguska impact over Siberia, Russian Federation, on 30 June 1908. On a related note - we now have a United Nations designated International Year of Asteroid Awareness and Planetary Defence, 2029, as declared by General Assembly in its resolution 79/86.

Distinguished Delegates,

Allow me to commend the work of the Office for Outer Space Affairs, which plays a prominent role as the substantive secretariat for our intergovernmental bodies and through its other key work areas. I extend my appreciation to the Director of the Office, Ms. Aarti Holla-Maini, and her dedicated team for their substantive support to the Committee and the preparations for this session. The Office continues to uphold the Secretary-General's responsibilities under outer space treaties and principles, including maintaining the UN Register of Objects Launched into Outer Space. I commend the Office's efforts in fostering dialogue among stakeholders, building capacity in space law and policy, empowering women and youth in the space sector, supporting regional education centres, and promoting space sustainability.

Distinguished Delegates,

We have a demanding programme and limited time in this shortened, six-day session, enriched by various side events and exhibitions. Let me take this opportunity to invite you to respect the speaking time, so that we can ensure to accommodate deliberations on all substantive agenda items and to have sufficient time to reach agreement on concrete steps to take on the critical issues before us, and ultimately to adopt the report by consensus.

Under the Moroccan Chairmanship, I'm committed to work diligently with all delegations within the framework of mutual trust and the promotion of multilateralism, to bridge differing perspectives through constructive dialogue and to build consensus and reach decisions on UNISPACE IV, ATLAC, and the Mid-term Review of the Space2030 Agenda.

I count on your cooperation and look forward to a successful session. With the Vienna Spirit of collaboration, I'm confident that we can enhance this Committee's impact and strengthen its vital role in global space governance and as a key multilateral platform for international cooperation in space activities.

I thank you for your kind attention.
