

**Agenda Item 14: General Exchange of views on the application of International Law to small satellite activities**

**Madam Chairperson and Distinguished Delegates,**

In recent times, small satellites have emerged as one of the most preferred options for a new entrant to venture into the space arena. The ridesharing capability of modern launch vehicles has further enabled a significantly large number of small satellites to be deployed in a single launch. Large constellations of small satellites are also getting established in outer space.

**Madam Chairperson,**

Most of the small satellites launched are primarily deployed in the Low Earth Orbit region, which is already overcrowded. Due to their small sizes, these satellites are often difficult to track and be identified unambiguously after their launch. This limitation leads to poor knowledge of their orbital positions, which in turn, significantly compounds the decision-making process of collision avoidance. Furthermore, most of the small satellites lack the propulsion systems necessary to perform evasive maneuvers. Consequently, the fuel penalties and the associated operational overheads for collision avoidance need to be solely borne by conventional satellite operators. The lack of information to contact their operators poses another major challenge for coordination towards close approach risk mitigation. Since some of these satellites tend to be operational only for a short period of time, sometimes they may not even feature in their respective national registries. Most of these satellites are prone to on-orbit failure and also lack the specific capability for post-mission disposal, and continue to pose a collision risk to their neighboring operational assets. In particular, it is important to sensitize this august forum on the potential collision risks to crewed space missions by a small satellite which are lacking adequate maneuverability, trackability, and system reliability. The proliferation of large constellations of small satellites is anticipated to pose unprecedented challenges to the safety of spaceflight.

**Madam Chairperson,**

As a way forward, all space actors need to recognise the importance of the widespread implementation of best practices for conducting outer space operations in a safe and sustainable manner, especially those which address improving trackability, unique identifiability and more accurate orbital position. We believe that these best practices, at present voluntary in nature, need to be supplemented with adequate formal international mechanisms for more widespread implementation. Furthermore, all Member States are encouraged to develop and adopt necessary regulatory mechanisms to ensure satellite launches and on-orbit operations are compliant with the existing international guidelines on space debris mitigation and the long-term sustainability of outer space activities.

**Madam Chairperson,**

Indian delegation urges this subcommittee to take the necessary steps to develop basic guidelines that would enable small satellite operators to conduct their operations safely and responsibly, while not being overly restrictive to discourage a new entrant to embark on space ventures. A wider consultation with stakeholders, including the emergent players from developing nations and private entities, can be held to develop an appropriate framework that

addresses the aforementioned issues. India looks forward to playing a proactive role to formulate a more systematic and standardized approach to tackle the challenges associated with small satellite activities.

**Thank You, Madam Chairperson and Distinguished Delegates.**