

AGENDA ITEM 10

GENERAL EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION AND VIEWS ON LEGAL MECHANISMS RELATING TO SPACE DEBRIS MITIGATION MEASURES, TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE WORK OF THE SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBCOMMITTEE

STATEMENT BY EMILY PIERCE, U.S. REPRESENTATIVE TO THE LEGAL SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE UN COMMITTEE ON THE PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE

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Chair, the United States welcomes the continued exchange of information regarding legal mechanisms relating to space debris mitigation measures. The United States has long recognized the importance of managing the creation and effects of space debris and supports efforts to evolve those practices to ensure continued safety of space operations in the future.

The outer space activities carried out or licensed by the U.S. Government comply with a robust framework of statutes, regulations, and internal policies that take into account space debris mitigation, tracking and characterization, and remediation from the design stage of a satellite or space launch system to its end-of-life disposal. Private sector space actors are also contributing important views to these conversations, especially as the private sector develops innovative solutions to the challenges presented by space debris.

The United States Novel Space Activities Authorization and Supervision Framework, approved by the National Space Council in December 2023, identifies the U.S. Government Orbital Debris Mitigation Standard Practices (ODMSP), which are more restrictive and quantitative than the UNCOPUOS Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines, as the standard to be referenced by U.S. regulatory

agencies when regulating private sector space activities. Under this Framework, U.S. agencies are to evaluate the need to update the ODMSP every two years, the results of which we look forward to sharing at future Subcommittee sessions.

In addition, U.S. regulatory authorities continue to update their licensing rules, implementation, and related guidance on orbital debris mitigation for non-governmental satellites. For example, Low-Earth orbit satellites authorized by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and launched after September 29, 2024, will be subject to a requirement that they be de-orbited within five years following the end of their mission. The FCC has also advanced enforcement of existing regulation related to debris. In October 2023, the FCC announced its first space debris enforcement action related to the failure of a U.S. company to deorbit a satellite. The enforcement resulted in a financial penalty and the company agreed to a compliance plan. In addition, the FCC made additional information about orbital debris mitigation and its licensing processes available on the FCC website (www.fcc.gov/space/transparency-initiative).

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has recently begun to reconsider its orbital debris mitigation and spacecraft disposal authority for remote sensing satellites, to ensure that responsible disposal and debris mitigation of all spacecraft with U.S. licenses are effectively supervised. NOAA has proactively conducted outreach and provided guidance on these topics to industry.

The United States continues to implement the UN COPUOS Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines and the Long-Term Sustainability Guidelines associated with minimizing and mitigating the effects of space debris because of our strong interest in the safety and long-term sustainability of space activities, and our

judgment that these practices represent sound approaches to debris mitigation. The United States has also developed six overarching national policies, an R&D strategy and action plan, and cost benefit analyses related to debris mitigation, tracking and characterization, and remediation. The U.S. private sector is also developing, and in some cases already operating, satellite life extension, debris removal, and on-orbit servicing missions. The United States government supports these developments and will continue to ensure they are appropriately supervised.

To help address the challenges of a rapidly changing space operating environment and promote the beneficial use of outer space for generations to come, NASA recently released the first part of its integrated Space Sustainability Strategy for Earth Orbit. This strategy focuses on advancements NASA can make toward measuring and assessing space sustainability in Earth orbit, identifying cost-effective ways to meet sustainability targets, incentivizing the adoption of sustainable practices through technology and policy development, and increasing efforts to share and receive information with the rest of the global space community. This strategy reflects the continued commitment of the United States to address the space debris problem for long-term sustainability of outer space activities.

Another key space debris mitigation objective is to avoid the creation of new debris, especially through easily avoidable actions, like conducting destructive direct-ascent anti-satellite (ASAT) missile testing. UN General Assembly Resolution 77/41 calls on all States to commit not to conduct destructive direct-ascent anti-satellite missile tests. This is not solely a security issue; the commitment contributes to the long-term sustainability of outer space

and enables ongoing peaceful exploration and use of outer space. We again urge all UNCOUOS Members to consider making this commitment and are pleased that 38 countries have already done so.

Approaches to mitigating, tracking and characterization, and remediation of debris are linked to evolving technologies. As technologies change, so too do the available methods for debris mitigation, tracking and characterization, and remediation as well as the cost-benefit tradeoffs of doing so. While we do not see the wisdom in codifying specific debris mitigation standards into international law at this time given the evolving technical aspects, we support the continued development by Member States and intergovernmental organizations of debris guidelines and best practices, and we believe that the implementation of such guidelines and best practices by even more spacecraft operators is vital to the safety and long-term sustainability of space flight.

Safety and sustainability in space are of paramount importance for the United States, and we will continue to support wholeheartedly international cooperation to further debris mitigation technology and techniques.

Thank you, Chair.