STATEMENT BY THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

LEGAL SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE: 64th SESSION

AGENDA ITEM 9:

LEGAL ASPECTS OF SPACE DEBRIS MITIGATION

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Check Against Delivery

Chair,

The South African delegation expresses its appreciation for the opportunity to deliver a statement on matters relating to the legal aspects of space debris mitigation.

The legal aspects of space debris mitigation are becoming an increasingly important area of space law as the number of satellites and space activities continue to expand. The accumulation of space debris poses serious threats to the safety of spacecraft, the security of astronauts, and the sustainability of current and future space missions. Addressing these challenges require a coordinated international response, underpinned by strong legal frameworks that promote responsibility, transparency, and cooperation among all space actors.

In this regard, South Africa commends the Secretariat for providing a comprehensive historical summary of diverse discussions on the legal aspects of space debris mitigation.

Chair,

As the number of space missions increase, it is imperative that we govern the exploration and use of outer space responsibly. The foundation of this effort is the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, which firmly establishes state responsibility for all space activities, whether conducted by government agencies or private entities — a responsibility that extends to preventing the creation of space debris.

Building on the foundation of the Outer Space Treaty, three additional agreements — the Rescue Agreement of 1968, the Liability Convention of 1972, and the Registration Convention of 1976 — provide critical frameworks. They promote international cooperation, establish liability for damages caused by space objects, and require states to register space objects, a vital tool for tracking and managing debris in Earth's orbit.

Recognizing the growing risks posed by space debris, the United Nations also introduced guidelines in 2007, updated in 2018, to encourage best practices in debris mitigation. Although these guidelines are non-binding, they have become an important reference for national space regulations. They call for the careful design of spacecraft to minimize debris, responsible end-of-life disposal such as controlled deorbiting, and, where feasible, the active removal of existing debris. Together, these agreements and guidelines form the backbone of international efforts to keep outer space safe, sustainable, and accessible for future generations.

Chair,

Every country involved in space activities also has its own regulatory framework governing space debris mitigation, reflecting their obligations under international treaties but also establish more specific requirements.

As part of its ongoing space policy review, South Africa is introducing measures requiring licensed entities, including commercial operators, to demonstrate credible plans for mitigating space debris. These measures include, among others, the ability to deorbit satellites at the end of their operational life, adherence to responsible design standards, and operational protocols to avoid collision.

Chair,

As space activities increase, legal frameworks need to evolve. Future legal developments are likely to focus on:

- Incentivizing debris removal and mitigation technologies

- Clarifying rules on collision avoidance and coordination: As the orbital environment becomes more congested, clear legal standards on satellite design, operations, and collision avoidance responsibilities will be essential to prevent further debris creation.

- Insurance and liability in space debris cases: The growing risk of space debris-related accidents will likely lead to the creation of new insurance models and international liability frameworks to compensate entities harmed by space debris.

In conclusion, **Chair,**

Space debris mitigation is a multifaceted issue that combines space law, international cooperation, and commercial interests. While significant progress has been made through international treaties, guidelines, and national legislation, there are still many legal and practical challenges that need to be addressed to ensure a sustainable and safe space environment.

In this regard, future legal frameworks must balance innovation with environmental responsibility to ensure that space remains accessible and safe for generations to come.

Thank you,