General exchange of views on the legal aspects of space traffic management.

Mr. Chair and Distinguished Delegates,

In recent years, the diversification in space activities combined with technological advancement and ease of access to space have led to a sharp rise in the active satellite population in outer space surrounding the Earth. In particular, the current trend towards deployment of several large constellations of satellites is likely to increase orbital congestion. With the increasing number of satellites, resolving close approach risks between two active assets requires inter-operator coordination, making Space Traffic Management or STM complex for ensuring safe and sustainable space operations.

Mr. Chair,

The growing economic benefit of space applications has attracted a greater number of private players. Therefore, the current scenario requires States to have a robust policy in place to regulate and oversee their activities. The Indian Space Policy 2023 mandates adherence to the internationally accepted guidelines for ensuring safe and sustainable space operations by all Indian space actors. ISRO System for Safe and Sustainable Space Operations Management, IS4OM, steadfastly pursues all efforts for spaceflight safety. It also engages with emerging space players in synergy with the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre (IN-SPACe) to promote a robust framework for safe and sustainable space activities.

India actively participates in all fora involved in STM, such as IAA Space Debris Working Group, the IAF Space Traffic Management Technical Committee and the ISO Working Group 7. In 2024, India hosted the annual meet of Inter Agency Debris Coordination Committee at Bengaluru where India's intent for Debris Free Space Mission (DFSM) was unveiled. The key directives of DFSM include coordination and data sharing at national and international levels for spaceflight safety and sustainability, and building capabilities for space object tracking and monitoring. India recognises the importance of Space Situational Awareness for obtaining the relevant reliable, accurate, and timely information for the safety of spaceflight, and prioritizes the establishment of observational facilities and global collaboration to develop comprehensive SSA capabilities.

Mr. Chair,

Space operators usually adhere to the relevant best practices to safeguard their space assets and coordinate among themselves for on-orbit risk mitigation. An effective STM relies heavily on coordination and transparent data sharing. In the absence of any universally accepted STM framework, such data sharing is carried out purely based on goodwill, mutual understanding, and trust. Now, the trend towards small satellites in the space sector, while greatly beneficial for start-ups and academic instructions to embark into space ventures, is also accompanied by the commonly faced predicaments of their lack of operator details, accurate orbital data, and capability to perform collision avoidance. Therefore, one of the key enabling factors of STM is awareness raising on the obligations of the State, on-orbit collision risks and inter-operator coordination among the emergent space actors, including those of small satellites.

Mr. Chair,

There are several provisions within the framework of non-binding LTS Guidelines that are foundational to STM practices, such as adoption of a regulatory framework, rational and equitable use of radio frequency and orbital region, data sharing, enhanced tracking, safety of space operations, and promoting international cooperation and capacity-building.

Mr. Chair

While the ongoing multilateral collaborations among space-faring nations for the safety of space operations serve as a stepping stone for the emergence of a global STM, India advocates for a greater engagement and exchange of views among Member States in this regard.

Thank You, Mr Chair and Distinguished Delegates.