

Canada**Agenda Item 5 –Status and application of the five UN treaties on outer space, and ways and means, including capacity-building, to promote their implementation.****Delivered by: Curtis Schmeichel, Global Affairs Canada**

Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space
Legal Subcommittee
Sixty-fourth session, Vienna, May 5-16, 2025

Chair, Distinguished delegates,

There has been a phenomenal increase of space objects being placed in Earth orbit over the last decade. This increase has led to a corresponding increase in launches and in space objects being deorbited. While re-entering space objects that survive to reach the surface of the Earth are still quite rare, this trend is on the rise. The volume of launch vehicles, or parts thereof, returning to the surface of the Earth in various different conditions has also increased.

Given the trend of space objects, their launch vehicles, or component parts returning to the surface of the Earth with greater frequency, COPUOS should consider assessing the effects or impacts of this trend. The first step in assessing any new trend is to collect data and this is where international space law is well equipped for the task, if it is faithfully implemented.

Chair, Distinguished delegates,

The *Agreement on the Rescue of Astronauts, the Return of Astronauts and the Return of Objects Launched into Outer Space* contains important rights and obligations related to the increased presence of space objects, launchers, or their components parts returning to the surface of the Earth. Each Contracting Party to the Rescue and Return Agreement must notify the launching authority and the UN Secretary-General if it

Canada

Agenda Item 5 –Status and application of the five UN treaties on outer space, and ways and means, including capacity-building, to promote their implementation.

Delivered by: Curtis Schmeichel, Global Affairs Canada

Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space
Legal Subcommittee
Sixty-fourth session, Vienna, May 5-16, 2025

discovers a space object or its component parts has returned to Earth in territory under its jurisdiction, on the High Seas, or in any other place not under the jurisdiction of any State. If requested by the launching authority, such a Contracting Party must take steps it finds practicable to recover the space objects, or its component parts, and return those objects or parts to the launching authority. The costs incurred to recover and return a space object, or its component parts, are to be borne by the launching authority.

Canada has experienced several instances of a space object or its component parts returning to the surface of the Earth in its territory, the most dramatic instance being the crash of Cosmos 954, a satellite carrying a nuclear power source. However, there have been more recent instances of component parts from space objects landing in Canada's prairie provinces. In these instances, Canada has carefully and faithfully implemented the obligations in the Rescue and Return Agreement. Canada has notified the launching authority and the UN Secretary-General of the discovery of the space object or its component parts. Canada has offered to recover and return the space object or its component parts to the launching authority, and when requested, has returned those component parts. Canada would be pleased to share more details regarding the steps it has taken to fulfill these obligations with any delegation that is interested.

Canada would be interested to learn more about how other States have handled these situations and how those States have implemented the obligations under the

Canada**Agenda Item 5 –Status and application of the five UN treaties on outer space, and ways and means, including capacity-building, to promote their implementation.****Delivered by: Curtis Schmeichel, Global Affairs Canada**

Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space
Legal Subcommittee
Sixty-fourth session, Vienna, May 5-16, 2025

Rescue and Return Agreement. Sharing these experiences serves not only to reinforce respect for these obligations but also offers an opportunity to assess the trend of space objects or their component parts returning to the surface of the Earth to determine if it raises any issues or challenges that might need to be addressed by COPUOS. It might be advisable for UNOOSA to compile an inventory of these instances to evaluate the situation. Indeed, there is a great deal of public interest, and at times anxiety, over re-entries of space objects and particularly in cases where component parts reach the surface of the Earth. A review or study of this trend might assist in re-assuring the public and maintaining its confidence in and support for the peaceful exploration and use of outer space.

Chair, Distinguished delegates,

While there have been many instances of a space object or its component parts re-entering the atmosphere and reaching the Earth's surface, we have thankfully not witnessed damage to persons or property similar to or greater than the Cosmos 954 crash. Nevertheless, it may be wise to carefully review the trend over the last few years to determine if the obligations under the relevant outer space treaties are being faithfully implemented and whether there are best practices or guidelines that can minimize any potential damage that could arise from increased re-entries. Such a review could demonstrate to the world that COPUOS and its members States are exercising diligence

Canada

Agenda Item 5 –Status and application of the five UN treaties on outer space, and ways and means, including capacity-building, to promote their implementation.

Delivered by: Curtis Schmeichel, Global Affairs Canada

Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space
Legal Subcommittee
Sixty-fourth session, Vienna, May 5-16, 2025

in the implementation of the outer space treaties and in the goal of ensuring that outer space activities are conducted in a manner that is safe, secure, and sustainable both in outer space and on Earth.

Thank you.