Statement by the Delegation of Ukraine at the 64th Session of the COPUOS Legal Subcommittee (05-16 May 2025, Vienna)

Agenda Item 9: General exchange of information and views on legal mechanisms relating to space debris mitigation and remediation measures, taking into account the work of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee

Mr Chair, Distinguished Delegates,

The Delegation of Ukraine is pleased to contribute to this important discussion. We would like to structure our statement in two parts:

- (1) an overview of Ukraine's current national efforts in this domain, and
- (2) several proposals that we believe merit further international consideration toward the development of a more coherent legal framework.

First, Ukraine has a long-standing commitment to responsible behaviour in outer space. As one of the initiators of the Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee (IADC), Ukraine contributed to the foundational work that led to the COPUOS Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines. More recently, in January 2025, we took part in the update of these Guidelines, and we continue to incorporate their principles into national law and authorization procedures.

Ukraine supports the Zero Debris Approach and has incorporated space debris mitigation measures into its national space activity authorization procedures. These measures include improving launch vehicles, engines, and spacecraft design; developing specialized software; passivation; end-of-life operations; and responsible disposal practices.

Ukrainian researchers have also conducted studies on the legal aspects of onorbit servicing as a tool for debris remediation, particularly within the context of a future circular space economy.

Second, we wish to draw attention to a growing area of concern: the harmful interference caused by non-functional and non-operational space objects and their fragments—particularly in the air and ocean environments.

While current space law addresses debris mitigation primarily through prelaunch and post-mission phases, there remains a legal grey area regarding the environmental impacts of space debris re-entering the Earth's atmosphere and splashing down in the oceans.

For instance, maritime law does not clearly classify whether such splashdowns constitute dumping, nor does it adequately address how space debris mitigation should be regulated to prevent the transfer of environmental harm from outer space to various components of the Earth's ecosystem.

Conversely, the use of terrestrial resources—such as nuclear power sources onboard spacecraft—raises significant concerns when such objects are involved in collisions or debris fragmentation events, potentially causing further environmental and safety hazards.

As launch rates increase and orbital congestion grows, these issues will only become more urgent. The interconnectedness of space and terrestrial ecosystems—and the reciprocal dependencies of their sustainability—must be recognized in future regulatory efforts.

Therefore, Ukraine emphasizes the importance of cross-sectoral consultation between relevant international organizations to align their respective mandates in addressing the protection the Earth-space environment as an interdependent socio-ecological system.

These consultations could contribute meaningfully to the development of new legal and policy instruments for space traffic coordination, debris governance, and environmental protection, in line with Action 56 of the UN Pact for the Future.

Thank you, Mr Chair.