United Kingdom, 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

Chair, distinguished delegates,

The UK delegation is pleased to have this opportunity to share the progress and developments made in the past year with regards to space debris mitigation.

We would like to thank UNOOSA and delegates who attended, for their support of the joint side event held with Japan and New Zealand on Weds 7th to expand on recent projects to develop the legal frameworks supporting Rendezvous and Proximity Operations. We would also like to thank our industry panellists from Clearspace, D-Orbit, and Astroscale for their support and insights during the session.

The UK government recognises the growing volume of debris in space is both environmentally and commercially unsustainable, requiring swift and shared action to clean up Earth's orbit. The UK is committed to promoting the sustainable use of space for all and reiterates the need for collaboration and discussion on how we can work together to tackle the issue of space debris. The UK plays an active and leading role in the development of international best practice for the long-term sustainability of outer space.

The UK is pleased to have signed an arrangement with New Zealand to support debris removal and in-orbit servicing missions, and we are grateful to have the opportunity to deliver the technical presentation on this. The arrangement provides a set of principles for allocating liability between different states involved in the different stages of these missions. It does this within the framework set out in the Convention on International Liability for Damage Caused by Space Objects (the 'Liability Convention'), as well as setting out principles around licensing and information sharing.

The UK believes that active debris removal (ADR) is a key aspect of debris mitigation and remediation, and regulatory frameworks must play a key role in enabling these missions. Through innovative projects such as the rendezvous and proximity operations regulatory sandbox, we are working with the industry and independent regulator to improve the regulatory environment in the UK for debris removal and in-orbit servicing missions, including for the UK's national ADR mission. This will remove at least two unprepared, UK-licensed and non-operational satellites from Low Earth Orbit and is targeting a launch date in 2028.

The UK set up the National Space Operations Centre in 2024, which provides uncontrolled re-entry early warnings, satellite collision avoidance, fragmentation alerting and monitoring, support to license monitoring and enforcement, and space weather notifications and advice. Some of the largest debris-generating events in history have been the destructive testing of direct-ascent anti-satellite missiles, most recently in 2021. The UK has committed not to conduct such tests, as part of our enduring efforts to promote responsible space behaviours. We call on others to make the same commitment in line with the General Assembly resolution 77/41.

The UK national legislation incorporates internationally recognised guidelines and standards on space debris. The UK continues to be a strong advocate for the important work of the Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee (IADC), and is privileged to hold the chairship for 2025. All satellites and launch vehicles licensed by or launched from the UK meet the appropriate IADC space debris mitigation guidelines. We have also implemented the LTS guidelines in our national approach and are encouraging their widespread implementation via our international work.

As we look beyond our own planet to the Moon and Mars, we must ensure our activities minimise debris that damage the lunar environment or affect future Missions. This is why the UK is developing regulation around sustainability in the lunar environment and beyond Earth orbit. The UK believes that the growing number of missions to the Moon means that beyond-Earth orbit sustainability will become ever more salient. We believe there is an increasing need for greater international discussion to ensure we protect the Lunar environment for future use, and we welcome discussions on lunar debris mitigation with the ATLAC.

Remediating, preventing, and mitigating against space debris remains a priority for the UK. The UK believes that through robust national legislative frameworks and international cooperation, positive sustainability and safety outcomes can be achieved.

Thank you, Chair.