Item 12 - General exchange of views on the application of international law to smallsatellite activities.

Thank you Chair, distinguished delegates,

The United Kingdom recognises the importance of space services and provides significant annual investment into space missions and associated technologies. Strategic investments by the UK Government into companies such as OneWeb is, in part, in response to the socioeconomic benefit that investments in satellite communications can provide with their potential to connect people worldwide.

Satellite constellations are enhancing global connectivity by providing high-speed internet access to remote and underserved areas, bridging the digital divide and contributing to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly 9c: Significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020.

The UK appreciates the importance of growing this sector, and has committed to developing research and development capability, and accelerating the commercialisation and industrialisation of key technologies and industry capabilities necessary for UK firms to meet demand for high-volume constellation production. This will be achieved through government programmes and catalysing private sector investment.

The UK Space Agency's Connectivity in Low Earth Orbit programme will make significant investment into developing UK expertise in key technologies in this area over the next four years. Initial funding has been given to companies to develop novel silicon chips and software for a user terminal that will be compatible with UK and European constellations like OneWeb Next Generation and to develop the small and flexible Mobility and Autonomy Market User Terminal which will allow users to choose their operator and orbit via an app, reducing costs and enhancing global configurability.

The activities of non-governmental entities concerning constellations are to be authorised and supervised by States in accordance with international law, including international space law. The UK's flexible, outcome-focussed regulatory framework has been used to licence constellations, in accordance with the relevant provisions in the Outer Space Treaty. Whilst we continue to develop our framework to adapt to the growing needs of operators, the UK recognises that there will need to be trade-offs between the needs of small satellite operators and the needs of the astronomical community. The UK Government has made a substantial financial investment in developing the UK's astronomical observation capabilities.

The UK is home to the Square Kilometre Array Observatory (SKAO) Global Headquarters and co-funded the sites expansion in 2019. The SKAO is a next-generation radio astronomy-driven Big Data facility that will revolutionise our understanding of the Universe and the laws of fundamental physics. Enabled by cutting-edge technology, it promises to have a major impact on society, in science and beyond. The SKAO is a co-host of the International Astronomical Union Centre for the Protection of the Dark and Quiet Sky from Satellite Constellation Interference (the IAU CPS) and the UK fully supports the work of this group.

Streaks in astronomical images from sunlight reflected off of satellites compromise astronomical data quality, particularly for images obtained in twilight and at lower elevations in the sky. These streaks interfere with the discovery and tracking of small solar system bodies like near-Earth objects and comets, as they can mask or distort the appearance of faint objects, making identification and orbital calculations more difficult. It is therefore crucial that we take steps to mitigate the impacts on optical observatories posed by satellite constellations by continuing to work closely with both satellite operators and the astronomical community to enable the continued use of outer space is safe, secure, and sustainable.

Thank you, Chair.