58th Session, Vienna/Online, 19-30 April 2021

Item 7: Space debris

Madam Chair,

Distinguished Delegates,

The hazards to satellites in Earth's orbit posed by the growing number of close encounters between operational satellites and space debris are widely recognized. Space debris is a topic that is being addressed by scientists and engineers for many years now – worldwide – at various levels in order to limit the number of defunct objects remaining in Earth's orbit and to minimize the risk to operational spacecraft. With the emergence of numerous satellite constellations this risk will only increase in the future.

The space debris challenges are actively addressed in Germany by several means: a national research program for matters related to space debris has been established for many years. Space debris mitigation guidelines for Germany's national space missions are implemented by the German Space Agency consistent with the "UNCOPUOS Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines" and the "IADC Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines". Germany is also continuously enhancing its capabilities in the field of surveillance and tracking of space debris with the German Space Situational Awareness Centre being the focal point on operational aspects of space situational awareness for the German government.

In this regard, we are very happy to report that the German Experimental Surveillance and Tracking Radar, GESTRA, – a capability on whose development we have reported continuously in recent years – has been installed on its final operational site last year. GESTRA will greatly enhance Germany's space situational awareness capabilities and will also contribute to the European Union's Space Surveillance and Tracking programme, EU SST. It will be operated by the German Space Situational Awareness Centre and be used for both, operational and research activities. GESTRA will assist our collective efforts to keep space safe and sustainable.

Madam Chair, distinguished delegates,

the Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee (IADC), as the primary forum of technical and scientific expertise on all space debris matters, continues to play a major role in the further development of technical space debris mitigation guidelines. In 2020, the IADC updated its

guidelines to reflect the evolving knowledge of the space debris situation. This year, Germany holds the chair of the IADC which will meet next week to discuss further improvements of the debris mitigation guidelines. We are looking forward to their proceedings and hope that they will continue to inform our Subcommittee with their valuable expertise.

Madam Chair,

distinguished delegates,

Germany is committed to a responsible and sustainable use of the Earth's orbit by minimizing the impact of its space missions on the future orbital environment in order to support a sustainable use of outer space. As part of its presidency of the Council of the European Union last year, Germany has initiated a dialogue to foster a European coordinated approach to space traffic management. This process will conclude with a dedicated European conference and will serve as a contribution to a safer and more sustainable space environment.

We thank you for your kind attention.