

Statement by SMPAG Chair to STSC 62st session (2025)

Madame Chair, distinguished delegates,

Thank you for the opportunity to address this Subcommittee. As the Chair of the Space Mission Planning Advisory Group (SMPAG) on behalf of ESA, I'm pleased to inform delegations about our work progress.

Madame Chair, distinguished delegates,

The purpose of SMPAG is to prepare for an international response to a near-Earth object (NEO) impact threat through the exchange of information, development of options for collaborative research and mission opportunities, and NEO threat mitigation planning activities.

SMPAG is comprised of space agencies and offices. We now have 19 members and 7 observer organizations. SMPAG is chaired by the European Space Agency. The UN Office for Outer Space Affairs acts as Secretariat to SMPAG, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 71/90.

Madame Chair, distinguished delegates,

Since our last reporting to this Subcommittee, SMPAG held its 23rd meeting in person in Milano, Italy, on 10 -11 October 2024, kindly hosted by the Italian Space Agency ASI, and its 24th meeting on 5 – 6 February 2025, in conjunction with this session of the Subcommittee.

Madame Chair, distinguished delegates,

Two main points drive the current work of SMPAG. Firstly, the notification by IAWN about the real asteroid designated "2024 YR4", which currently has an impact probability of about 1.9 % for December 2032. Secondly, SMPAG has been engaged in the ongoing hypothetical international exercise to test its capabilities.

Related to asteroid 2024 YR4, SMPAG agreed to issue a statement, also available on its webpage, which in summary informs, as follows: "...SMPAG will continue to actively monitor the evolution of the impact probability and possible knowledge about the object size. The Group has started to discuss activities, but considers it is premature to develop specific recommendation for missions. This will be reassessed at a future meeting which will be held towards the end of this visibility period (roughly the end of April/early May this year) or earlier, if the evolution of the threat merits."

Note that the impact probability is still changing daily. As of this morning, it is at 1.9 %.

Madame Chair, distinguished delegates,

SMPAG is also continuing its work on an international exercise, kindly coordinated by the Italian Space Agency ASI. SMPAG currently uses a simulated asteroid impact threat which was developed by an international team within the frame of IAWN to prepare a decision makers panel discussion at the upcoming Planetary Defense Conference 2025, taking place in Stellenbosch, South Africa, in May this year. More information on our activities is provided in the Status report by IAWN and SMPAG, made available today in conference room paper number 6.

Finally, SMPAG notes with satisfaction that the agreement by the UN to declare the year 2029 as International Year of Asteroid Awareness and Planetary Defence, as contained in the General Assembly resolution 79/86 of 4 December 2024.

Madame Chair, distinguished delegates, thank you for your kind attention.