

Dark and Quiet Sky for Science and Society
5-9 October 2020

Statement by Simonetta Di Pippo
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Distinguished speakers, dear participants, colleagues and friends,

Good morning, good afternoon and good evening.

On behalf of the Office for Outer Space Affairs, please allow me to welcome you to the Dark and Quiet Skies workshop.

Despite not having the pleasure of seeing you all in person, I am delighted that so many of you have joined us today. It is truly impressive to see great interest in the topic and to make my point, let me underline that we received over 800 registrations from almost 80 countries. And the diversity of the audience is also great news. We have participants from academia, space agencies and the commercial space sector.

The event stands as a great example of successful business continuity being delivered by UNOOSA during the ongoing pandemic. Through adaptation of our programmatic activities and the strength of our partnerships network, we are delivering continued engagement with the international space community across the full breath of our work.

The Dark and Quiet Skies initiative is a joint activity of the United Nations, Spain and the International Astronomical Union. And technically managed and supported by the National Optical-Infrared Astronomy Research Laboratory of the United States. I have the honour, together with Constance Walker, to co-chair the Scientific Organising Committee of this initiative and we are looking forward to 5 days of presentations of their work.

The United Nations, an organization with a global reach, brings together 193 countries and strives to facilitate cooperation between the organization and its Member States, among countries themselves and with external stakeholders. The unique convening power on the UN has been crucial to address a wide range of issues in the 75 years of its existence. And it is at this point in history, when the organization is becoming more relevant than ever.

The challenges we face – be it climate emergency, the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts, or matters of space safety, security and sustainability - will not be solved by any one country. We are in this together and it is the duty of the UN to serve as unifying force in addressing issues that concern all of humanity.

The space sector can indeed serve as sort of a role model for global cooperation. Since the 1950s, countries have come together through the UN in seeking common grounds on governing space activities in outer space with considerable success. As the only UN entity dedicated to space, UNOOSA is working across the legal, policy, scientific and technical aspects of making successful international cooperation in space a reality.

And the momentum behind the elevation of space matters on the UN agenda is strong. At the multilateral level the recent adoption of the Long-Term Sustainability guidelines, considerable growth of the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, and the global attendance of UNOOSA's events underline the continued appetite for multilateral diplomacy and friendly relations in this frontier environment.

The Dark and Quiet Skies initiative itself was mandated under the UN, showing full commitment of the Member States. UNOOSA hence welcomed the request to organise a conference on the general topic of light pollution together with IAU and the offer of the Government of Spain to host such gathering. We count on this event to push this item forward from a political perspective in the agenda of MS.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The progressive widening of the reach of artificial lighting and the use of radio spectrum interferes with nature and our view of the stars with direct implications on astronomical observations. The rapid growth in the number of satellites launched especially to LEO affects observations from ground-based astronomical observatories.

We need to find a common understanding. On the one hand side, constellations can help provide global internet coverage and bring the remaining 3 billion people online – a giant leap forward in connecting the globe. But at the same time, we must protect the Science of Astronomy.

We must engineer a step-change in discussions at the international level among all relevant actors. And the Dark and Quiet Skies initiative should do exactly that – proposing recommendations which can eventually be acted upon either by local governments or agreed to at the international level.

The draft recommendations will be presented for your consideration and updated based on the comments received and eventually presented in February 2021 at the STSC of COPUOS. Afterwards, the recommendations will be consolidated at the Dark and Quiet Skies Conference in Spain, in April 2021.

UNOOSA always stands ready to support activities of Member States in seeking solutions to issues in space and on Earth by bringing the community together through partnerships, networking and cooperation. As I said before, it is no time for unilateral actions when dealing with challenges that we collectively face.

UNOOSA is doing everything possible to make space benefits more accessible to everyone in this key moment for the planet when we must build back better. But at the same time, we call for upholding the highest standards of responsibility in space activities so that we can protect not only safety, security and sustainability in space, but also space science on Earth.

It is precisely through this medium of structured engagement with the global space community that we can make a real difference in the world and the skies above.

Thank you very much.