

UAE Space Agency

## *Speech for UNISPACE +50 Head of Space Agency Sessions*

His Excellency Dr. Eng. Mohammed Nasser Al Ahbabi,  
Director General of the UAE Space Agency

---

**Speech to be delivered on:** Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> June 2018

**Session:** Head of Space Agency Sessions

**Venue:** M Building, Vienna International Centre, Vienna, Austria

---

**Your Excellency's, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon.**

It is an honour to be here today and to be a part of this panel.

The sessions over the past couple days have been fascinating and informative, as one might expect from a gathering of this magnitude.

I would like to thank all the speakers and representatives who have shared their insights, and extend our most sincere gratitude to the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs for organizing this symposium.

UNISPACE +50 represents an important milestone in international collaboration and is crucial to advancing our collective space-faring capacities. Often the main constraints to humankind's efforts to explore and utilize space lie not in our technological and scientific ability. Rather, there are a range of social, economic and diplomatic factors that sometimes stand in the way of progress.

We are firm believers in the notion that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and for this reason we have staunchly supported the UNISPACE +50 preparation process. The UAE was privileged to have hosted the High Level Forums in 2016 and 2017 that laid the

foundations for the High-Level Segment this week and resulted in the adoption of the Dubai Declaration in late 2016.

We look forward to working closely with all relevant entities to support the implementation of the UNISPACE +50 resolution – when adopted – and continuing to raise awareness about the importance of space, its role in the future development of humanity, and the opportunities that already exist within this vibrant sector.

Outer space and its applications are playing an increasing role in the activities of all nations and their peoples' daily lives, and we believe that the knowledge and experience garnered through the peaceful exploration of space should be harnessed to tackle our planet's most pressing environmental challenges – from sourcing clean water to disaster management and support.

In less than two years our very own Mars Hope Probe is scheduled to be launched. Once it reaches the Red Planet and discovers more about its atmosphere, we hope to learn why it became dry and learn how we all can protect our planet from the same happening.

Meanwhile in the more distant future, as a part of our Mars 2117 project, we have challenged ourselves to lead an international effort to land humans on Mars in a 100 years and build a colony.

During the process of developing the technology and know-how necessary for such an endeavour we hope to learn about new methods of nutrition, energy conservation and efficient transportation of humans and materials.

It is because of these collectively beneficial outcomes that we hope UNISPACE +50 encourages all nations and interested entities, particularly in our own region – the Middle East – to participate in the peaceful exploration of our universe. As is evident by our own experience as a young nation and even younger space agency, no contribution is too small or insignificant.

Increased cooperation and international participation in the space sector under UNISPACE +50 will also foster a greater number of projects and initiatives, which we believe will go a long way in addressing the current space knowledge and access divide.

On the flip side of such progress and development are the challenges such an expansion in activity and accessibility bring.

Space debris poses an increasing threat to orbital bodies; satellite frequency bands are limited and prone to interference; growing space traffic is leading to orbital congestion; and cybersecurity presents a new range of challenges in space.

In summary, the orbital space environment is becoming more congested, more competitive, and more contested.

In the UAE we are of the firm belief that over the next period and as a part of UNISPACE +50 we need to be better prepared for such challenges in order to ensure the long term sustainability of space activities.

We believe such preparation should take place on two levels. On the national level, through the development of appropriate regulatory regimes; and on the international level, through the expansion or modification of existing governance systems and mechanisms – which is yet another reason why we are here today.

The establishment of effective regulatory and governance systems is all the more important because of the role private sector entities will need to play in the implementation of UNISPACE +50 if we are to continue grow and expand the sector in a sustainable way.

As crucial as engagement with the private sector is, we feel it is equally important that academic and research institutes have the opportunity to contribute to the future of space exploration through the implementation of UNISPACE +50.

These institutions not only possess the ability to contribute an incredible amount of knowledge towards the exploration and utilization of space but they are hubs for the youth, our most valuable resource.

I have witnessed the tremendous passion of UAE youth for advancing sciences and technology, and it is essential that worldwide these bright minds have available the science and research infrastructure they require to succeed.

This brings me to my final point, we are of the firm belief in UAE and that it is absolutely essential that as a part of UNISPACE +50 women are encouraged and provided equal opportunity to contribute to the development of our international space community.

Our own experience in the UAE has been very promising, more than 25 percent of our national space sector is made up of women, more than 35 percent of positions at the UAE Space Agency are held by women, and roughly half the workforce at the Mohammed Bin Rashid Space Centre are women.

We would not be where we are today as a country if it were not for their incredible contributions. Yet while progress is being made, the fact remains that women are underrepresented in STEM fields around the world and we believe that the space sector has a major role to play in addressing this challenge.

In closing, I would like to re-affirm the UAE's commitment to the success of this Symposium, the High-Level Segment, and UNISPACE +50. We are eager to continue learning from all of you, and to further contribute to the many fruitful discussions that have already begun to take place.

Your Excellency's, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen — I look forward to speaking to many of you over the next few days and I wish you all a successful event.

Thank you.

(1,054 words)