



**Committee on the Peaceful
Uses of Outer Space**
Legal Subcommittee
Sixtieth session
Vienna, 31 May–11 June 2021

Draft report

Annex I

Report of the Chair of the Working Group on the Status and Application of the Five United Nations Treaties on Outer Space

1. At its 995th meeting, on 31 May 2021, the Legal Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space reconvened its Working Group on the Status and Application of the Five United Nations Treaties on Outer Space, with Bernhard Schmidt-Tedd (Germany) as Chair.
2. From 1 to 9 June 2021, the Working Group held three meetings. The Working Group considered the following items:
 - (a) The status of the five United Nations treaties on outer space;
 - (b) UNISPACE+50 thematic priority 2, entitled “Legal regime of outer space and global space governance: current and future perspectives”;
 - (c) The set of questions of the Working Group on the Status and Application of the Five United Nations Treaties on Outer Space;
 - (d) The questionnaire on the application of international law to small-satellite activities.
3. The Working Group had before it the documents listed in paragraph [...] of the report of the Subcommittee on its sixtieth session.
4. At its 3rd meeting, on 9 June, the Working Group adopted the present report.
5. The Working Group considered UNISPACE+50 thematic priority 2 (work for 2020 as reflected in the multi-year workplan contained in [A/AC.105/1122](#), annex I, para. 8), owing to the cancellation of the fifty-ninth session of the Subcommittee, in 2020, as a result of the situation brought about by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, and noted that it was the final year under that multi-year workplan.
6. The Working Group welcomed with appreciation the working paper submitted by the Chair of the Working Group, entitled “Revised draft guidance document under



UNISPACE+50 thematic priority 2. ‘Legal regime of outer space and global governance: current and future perspectives’” (A/AC.105/C.2/L.313), and commended the Chair of the Working Group and the Secretariat for having incorporated all the comments received from States members of the Committee since the fifty-eighth session of the Subcommittee, in 2019.

7. The Working Group agreed to amend the chapeau to paragraph 69 of document A/AC.105/C.2/L.313 to read “In order to ensure safety of space activity, States are encouraged to:”. With that additional substantive amendment to the guidance document, the Working Group noted that paragraphs 1 and 2 would be updated to reflect the status of the document as a final report of the Working Group under the multi-year workplan.

8. The Working Group noted that the finalized guidance document would constitute a useful tool for guidance and capacity-building in space law and policy and would increase awareness among decision makers and policymakers at the national level. In that sense, the Working Group agreed that the title of the document should be “Bringing the benefits of space to all countries: a guidance document on the legal framework for space activities”.

9. The Working Group noted in that regard that, with the finalization of the guidance document, the Secretariat would proceed with the development of a dedicated page on the website of the Office for Outer Space Affairs, with background documentation and sources in support of the finalized guidance document.

10. The Working Group noted that the set of questions provided by the Chair of the Working Group on the Status and Application of the Five United Nations Treaties on Outer Space, taking into account the UNISPACE+50 process, contained in appendix I to the present report, provided for the continued exchange of views on a broad range of topics related to the status and application of the treaties, and that continued discussions in the Working Group would benefit from more contributions being made to the questions by States members and permanent observers of the Committee. The Working Group agreed that States members and permanent observers of the Committee should continue to be invited to contribute to the questions. Any replies received would be made available in conference room papers.

11. The Working Group agreed that States members and permanent observers of the Committee should continue to be invited to provide comments and responses to the questionnaire on the application of international law to small-satellite activities, as contained in appendix II to the present report. Any replies received would be made available in conference room papers.

12. The Working Group agreed that the Chair of the Working Group, in close consultation with the Secretariat, should present a summary of responses received over the years to the sets of questions as contained in appendices I and II to the present report, to be presented in a conference room paper to the Subcommittee at its sixty-first session, in 2022.

13. In relation to the sets of questions as contained in appendices I and II to the present report, the Working Group reaffirmed that the issue of large constellations and megaconstellations should continue to receive specific consideration in the responses to both sets of questions.

14. In that regard, the Working Group agreed that it should discuss, during the sixty-first session of the Subcommittee, potential recommendations on the registration of large constellations and megaconstellations, on which the Secretariat would prepare a document in all the official languages of the United Nations containing statistics and information on registration practices.

Appendix I

Set of questions provided by the Chair of the Working Group on the Status and Application of the Five United Nations Treaties on Outer Space, taking into account the UNISPACE+50 process

1. The legal regime of outer space and global space governance

1.1 What is the main impact on the application and implementation of the five United Nations treaties on outer space of additional principles, resolutions and guidelines governing outer space activities?

1.2 Are such non-legally binding instruments sufficiently complementing the legally binding treaties for the application and implementation of rights and obligations under the legal regime of outer space? Is there a need for additional actions to be taken?

1.3 What are the perspectives for the further development of the five United Nations treaties on outer space?

2. United Nations treaties on outer space and provisions related to the Moon and other celestial bodies

2.1 Do the provisions of the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies (Outer Space Treaty) constitute a sufficient legal framework for the use and exploration of the Moon and other celestial bodies or are there legal gaps in the treaties (the Outer Space Treaty and the Agreement Governing the Activities of States on the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies (Moon Agreement))?

2.2 What are the benefits of being a party to the Moon Agreement?

2.3 Which principles or provisions of the Moon Agreement should be clarified or amended in order to allow for wider adherence to it by States?

3. International responsibility and liability

3.1 Could the notion of “fault”, as featured in articles III and IV of the Convention on International Liability for Damage Caused by Space Objects (Liability Convention), be used for sanctioning non-compliance by a State with the resolutions related to space activities adopted by the General Assembly or its subsidiary bodies, such as Assembly resolution [47/68](#), on the Principles Relevant to the Use of Nuclear Power Sources in Outer Space, and the Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space? In other words, could non-compliance with resolutions adopted by the General Assembly or with instruments adopted by its subsidiary bodies related to space activities be considered to constitute “fault” within the meaning of articles III and IV of the Liability Convention?

3.2 Could the notion of “damage”, as featured in article I of the Liability Convention, be used to cover loss resulting from a manoeuvre performed by an operational space object in order to avoid collision with a space object or space debris not complying with the Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines of the Committee?

3.3 Are there specific aspects related to the implementation of international responsibility, as provided for in article VI of the Outer Space Treaty, in connection with General Assembly resolution [41/65](#), on the Principles Relating to Remote Sensing of the Earth from Outer Space?

3.4 Is there a need for traffic rules in outer space as a prerequisite to a fault-based liability regime?

4. Registration of space objects

4.1 Is there a legal basis to be found in the existing international legal framework applicable to space activities and space objects, in particular the provisions of the Outer Space Treaty and the Convention on Registration of Objects Launched into Outer Space (Registration Convention), which would allow the transfer of the registration of a space object from one State to another during its operation in orbit?

4.2 How could a transfer of activities or ownership involving a space object during its operation in orbit from a company of the State of registry to a company of a foreign State be handled in compliance with the existing international legal framework applicable to space activities and space objects?

4.3 What jurisdiction and control are exercised, as provided for in article VIII of the Outer Space Treaty, over a space object registered by an international intergovernmental organization in accordance with the provisions of the Registration Convention?

4.4 Does the concept of megaconstellations raise legal and/or practical questions, and is there a need to react with an adapted form of registration?

4.5 Is there a possibility, in compliance with the existing international legal framework, based on the existing registration practices, of introducing a registration “on behalf” of a State of a launch service customer, based on its prior consent? Would this be an alternative tool to react to megaconstellations and other challenges in registration?

5. International customary law in outer space

5. Are there any provisions in the five United Nations treaties on outer space that could be considered to form part of international customary law and, if yes, which ones? Could you explain the legal and/or factual elements on which your answer is based?

6. Proposal for other questions

6. Please suggest additional questions that could be inserted into the set of questions above to meet the objective of the UNISPACE+50 thematic priority on the legal regime of outer space and global space governance.

Appendix II

Questionnaire on the application of international law to small-satellite activities

1. Overview of small-satellite activities

1.1 Are small satellites serving the needs of your society? Has your country determined whether small satellites could serve an identified technological or development need?

1.2 Is your country involved in small-satellite activities such as designing, manufacturing, launching and operating? If so, please list projects, as appropriate. If not, are there future plans to do so?

1.3 Which kind of entity in your country is carrying out small-satellite activities?

1.4 Is there a focal point in your country responsible for coordinating small-satellite activities as part of your national space activities?

1.5 Are small-satellite activities carried out in the framework of international cooperation agreements? If so, what type of provisions specific to small-satellite activities are included in such cooperation agreements?

2. Licensing and authorization

2. Do you have a legal or regulatory framework to supervise any aspect of small-satellite activities in your country? If so, are they general acts or specific rules?

3. Responsibility and liability

3.1 Are there new challenges for responsibility and liability in view of small-satellite activities?

3.2 How are liability and insurance requirements enforced on an operator in your country, for a small satellite under your country's responsibility, in the event that "damage" occurs on the surface of Earth, to aircraft in flight or to another space object in orbit?

4. Launching State and liability

4.1 Since small satellites are not always deployed into orbit with dedicated rockets as in the case of larger satellites, there is a need for clarification in the understanding of the definition of "launch". When a launch of a small satellite requires two steps – first, launching from a site to an orbit and, second, deploying the small satellite to another orbit – in your view, would the first step be regarded as the "launch" within the meaning of the United Nations treaties on outer space?

4.2 Do you think that the current international regulatory regime is sufficient to regulate operators of small satellites or that there should be a new or different international regulatory approach to address operations of small satellites?

5. Registration

5. Does your country have a practice of registering small satellites? If so, does your country have a practice of updating the status of small satellites? Is there any legislation or regulation in your country that requires non-governmental entities to submit to the Government information for the purpose of registration, including updating of the status of small satellites they operate?

6. Space debris mitigation in the context of small-satellite activities

6. How has your country incorporated specific requirements or guidelines into its national regulatory framework to take into account space debris mitigation?