

United Nations First Committee  
NGO Presentation –Space Statement<sup>1</sup>

27<sup>th</sup> October 2008

*Headline*

Space security is a concept that will define our times. As a new facet of global security, fostering effective discussion and agreement on outer space activities is a vital element of the promotion of a stable future international security environment. With an eye to conflict prevention, it is timely for all actors utilizing space resources to acquaint themselves with the key elements of space security and to take an active role in international fora in discussing the future global direction of human interaction in space.

*The Current Situation*

Since the turn of the century, space activities have become an ever more central part of the modern world. From ATM transactions to disaster monitoring to personal navigation, space activities are now a crucial part of both developed and developing world infrastructure. The international community has seen many smaller States, most recently Vietnam, become space faring nations. The role of non-State actors, especially the commercial sector, is ever increasing. This growth however, comes with key concerns for international peace and security. Outer space is a fundamentally globalised environment with markedly national application. As States become more and more invested in space resources, the concern for maximizing the safe and sustainable use of space becomes ever more pressing.

Internationally, the political climate for progress on space security is improving. Many initiatives that have recently gotten under way aimed at looking at new ways to move the space security agenda forward. These initiatives should give us hope that sound international practices and policies can be created and that a climate of safe and sustainable use of space can be achieved. We urge States, especially those States outside of the established spacefaring nations and civil society alike to actively engage in these processes in order to safeguard access to the tremendous benefits space resources can provide.

*Key Concerns*

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Yet, without effective understanding and engagement by all parties, two key concerns stand out. First, the risk of outer space becomes a flashpoint in international relations leading to conflict and second, the risk of global conflict spilling into the space arena. These are concerns that affect all States that utilize space resources for all purposes be they humanitarian, economic, agricultural or military.

#### *Space as a 'flashpoint' for international conflict*

We urge the global community to move forward in a truly international manner to provide all spacefarers with necessary information in order that space resources can be protected for the community as a whole. We urge this Committee to support capacity-building initiatives in space, such as the international dissemination of space situational awareness data, as most basic tool of international space diplomacy for current, emerging and future space States.

Looking to the medium term, States, working collectively, will have to establish some form of space traffic coordination or "rules of the road" in order that global space activities may continue unhindered. Creating international accord on day-to-day working practices in space is a further step to providing stability and predictability in the space arena leading to an improved international security climate. It is vital that countries that plan to use space resources or to engage in space activities in the future, take part in the development of such a process so that foundations can be laid for the long-term sustainability of space activities for all actors.

#### *Debris and the Peace and Security Uses of Space Assets*

The use of space resources as a method in providing verification and information is a key tool in the stability of the global security climate. Many States currently rely on remote sensing imagery to verify their security environment. The removal of these resources would have a significant impact on international peace and security as many of those using such imagery have no other means to gather such information. Especially in the field of nuclear security, this should not be under-estimated.

It is vital that these resources continue to function in the long term. Yet space debris constitutes a major threat to continued use of imaging satellites. Threats to spacecraft from a collision with debris have increased and if we continue to launch at the current rate, humanity's long-term ability to carry out spacefaring activities may be in jeopardy.

The United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and the Fourth Committee's<sup>2</sup> endorsement of the Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines<sup>3</sup> was a strong step

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<sup>2</sup> A/RES/62/217

<sup>3</sup> A/62/20 (Annex)

however, further work needs to be done to consolidate the purpose and implementation of the content of the guidelines. Growing international consensus is forming on the necessity of working to building internationally recognized norms of behavior.

In this vein, we urge members of this Committee to seriously consider and respond to effective moves forward on working towards an international agreement on banning of the testing and use of debris-causing kinetic anti-satellite weapons. This would be a major step in limiting another possible means of escalation of the debris problem.

In light of the fact that the loss of space resources would lead to a significant deterioration in the international security climate, we urge the Committee to appraise itself of the debris situation, the threat that it poses to spacecraft, the resources they provide, and its relevance to international security.

#### Preventing Global Conflict from Spilling into the Space Arena

Second, global conflict must be prevented from spilling into the space arena. The risk to space assets, and therefore space services, from the threat of debris produced by conflict in space must be avoided. As an ever greater proportion of the world's population comes to rely on space resources, allowing space to become a contested area and an expression of global tensions, should be ever more strenuously prevented.

As stated by Mr. Vasiliev of the Russian Federation last week, building confidence and transparency is a strong first step in this endeavor.

We strongly urge the Committee to support both technical and diplomatic initiatives aimed at fostering confidence building measures between spacefaring States and which build towards stability in space relations. One such specific measure is the support of such an approach within the UN context, we urge all members to support the call of the Secretary-General's Advisory Board for the Disarmament Matters and urge Secretary-General Ban to establish a High Level Panel to assess international progress on outer space security and to examine how best the international agenda can be moved forward in the UN context. Such a cross-sectoral initiative encompassing scientific, political, military and legal input would be a significant contribution to elucidation of the space security situation.

#### Conclusions

To stress once again, space is a globalised arena. The activities of one actor can significantly affect all other spacefarers and users of space resources. One cannot exclude any space actor from the debate on the future direction of humanity's space activities. As use of space

continues to grow, there is a need for international engagement of all players, established and emerging, on how we interact in space. Whilst space was once conceptualized as a vast emptiness, key orbits are becoming ever more congested. In order to limit potential future conflict, international discussion on codes of conduct on space activities and also how we as an international community will manage space traffic are ever more timely. By its very nature, it is only through a truly global approach that effective safeguarding of space for future generations will be effected.

We are currently in the midst of a revolution in space activities, making the transition from the Cold War era where space was dominated by State-sponsored activities, mainly for the purpose of national security, to a new era where dozens of States, commercial providers, and non-State entities are engaging in a growing array of space activities. Humanity must examine the fundamental way in which we organize and plan space activities to meet the demands of this new era. Our use of space is only going to increase in the future as the barriers to entry fall and more and more actors realize the benefits.

Preventing outer space from becoming a flashpoint in international relations and the maintenance of space as a conflict-free environment are aspects that fall firmly within the purview of this Committee. With the end goal in sight of building an effective network of international norms and working towards a rules-based system, approaching many of the key topics in space security from a technical standpoint and utilizing the success of models such as the UN Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines to engender effective discussion and progress has the potential to foster the long-term sustainability of space activities and help propagate a more stable security environment in space as well as here on Earth.

We urge members of the General Assembly, individually and collectively, to take part in such a process. We as civil society, stand ready to support States and international decision-making fora through the provision of information, facilitation of discussion or in other way that we can.

Many thanks.

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