

Updated July 11, 2008

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## Background

The United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) was established as an ad hoc committee by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in 1959 in accordance with Resolution 1348 (XIII). In 1959, the UNGA passed Resolution 1472 (XIV) to make COPUOS a permanent committee, and added additional responsibilities. COPUOS is the secretariat to the UNGA on matters related to space, which is to say it supports the UNGA's deliberations and policy-making on behalf of the UN member states. Implementation of policies passed as General Assembly Resolutions (which can also be treaties) is conducted by the UN Office of Outer Space Affairs (OOSA), a small office within the United Nations Secretariat located in Vienna, Austria. OOSA is currently headed by Dr. Mazlan Othman.

## COPUOS responsibilities

- ◆ to review the scope of international cooperation in peaceful uses of outer space;
- ◆ to devise programs in this field to be undertaken by the United Nations;
- ◆ to encourage continued research and share information on outer space matters;
- ◆ to study legal problems arising from the exploration of outer space;
- ◆ to maintain close contact with governmental and non-governmental organizations concerned with outer space matters;
- ◆ to provide for the exchange of such information relating to outer space activities as Governments may supply on a voluntary basis, supplementing, but not duplicating, existing technical and scientific exchanges;
- ◆ to assist in the study of measures for the promotion of international cooperation in outer space activities; and
- ◆ implement recommendations from UNISPACE III (held in 1999).

Since 1962, COPUOS has also maintained a registry of space launches conducted by Member States. A registry of launchings has been maintained by the Secretariat since 1962, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1721 B (XVI). This activity supplements the 1976 Convention on Registration of Objects Launched into Outer Space.

There are currently (as of July 2008) 69 member States to COPUOS. In addition to States a number of international organizations, including both intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, have observer status with COPUOS and its Subcommittees. The Secure World Foundation was granted observer status to COPUOS in June 2008.

Dr. Ciro A. Arévalo Yepes of Columbia is currently the Chairman of COPUOS and will serve in that capacity until 2010. The fifty-first session of the Committee was held from 11-20 June 2008 at the United Nations Office in Vienna, Austria.

COPUOS has two standing sub-committees, the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee and the Legal Subcommittee. Each meets annually to consider questions put before them by the UNGA and accepts reports submitted to them for consideration.

## Scientific and Technical Subcommittee

The Scientific and Technical Subcommittee, currently chaired by Aboubekr Seddik Kedjar of Algeria until 2009, has held 45 annual sessions.

The Scientific and Technical Subcommittee regularly deals with:

- ◆ the United Nations Program on Space Applications;
- ◆ the implementation of the recommendations of the Third United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNISPACE III); and
- ◆ matters relating to remote sensing of the Earth by satellites, including applications for developing countries and monitoring of the Earth's environment.

## Legal Subcommittee

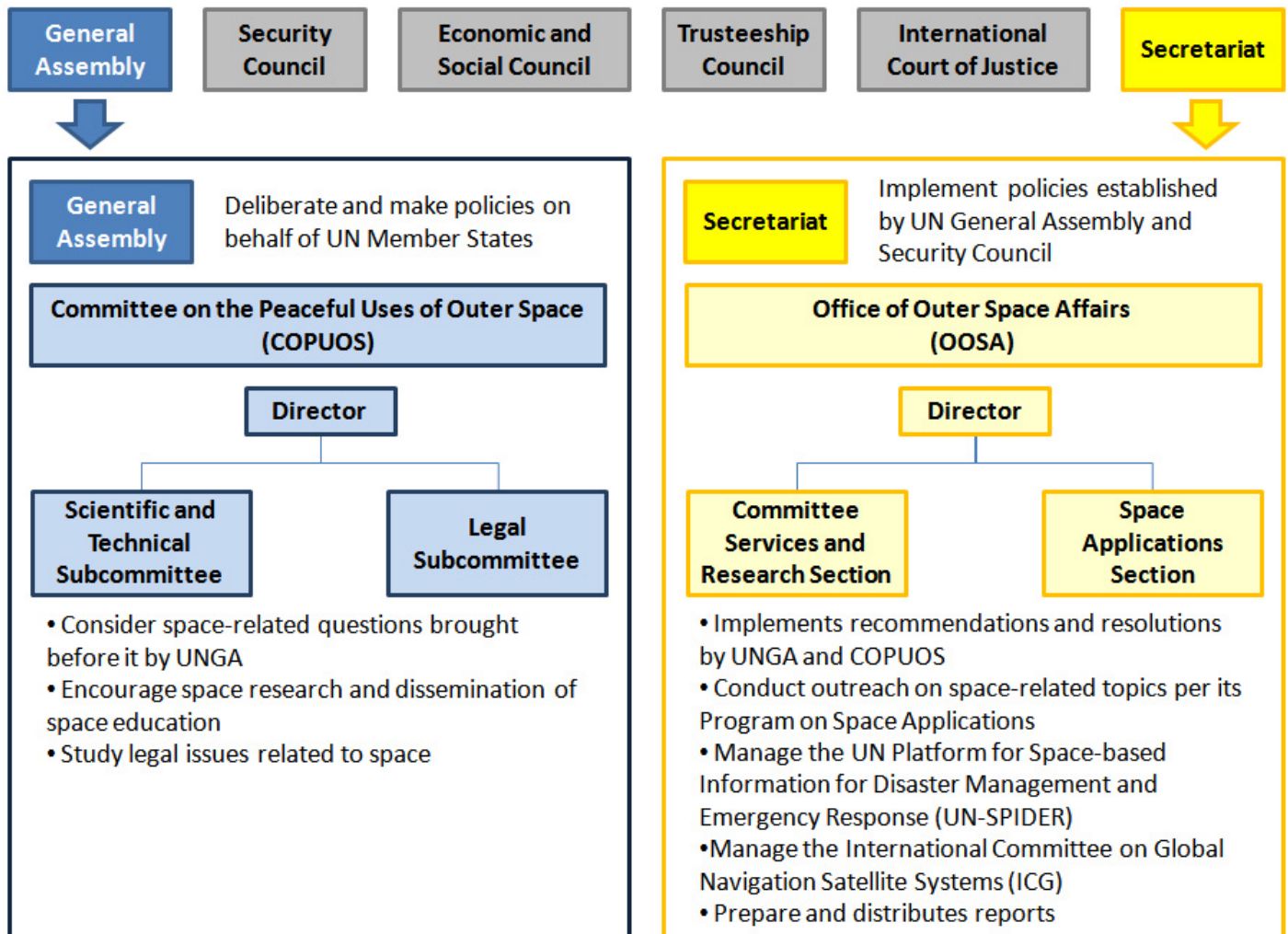
The Legal Subcommittee, currently chaired by Vladimír Kopal of the Czech Republic until 2009, has held 47 annual sessions.

The Legal Subcommittee regularly deals with:

- ◆ the status and application of the five United Nation treaties on outer space;
- ◆ information on the activities of international organizations relating to space law;
- ◆ matters relating to the definition and delimitation of outer space; and
- ◆ the character and utilization of the geostationary orbit (GEO), including consideration of ways and means to ensure the rational and equitable use of GEO without prejudice to the role of the International Telecommunication Union.

## The general structure of the UN and its two primary space-related organizations

### The six organs of the United Nations



In simplified terms, the UNGA is a legislative body whose representatives make international policy on behalf of the citizens of Member States. COPUOS plays a role in this process for the UNGA by deliberating on space matters. The Secretariat, headed by the UN Secretary-General, is responsible for carrying out the resolutions of the General Assembly and the 15-member Security Council. One could describe this body as the “executive body,” though the Secretary-General is more of a chief operating officer than a chief executive officer. OOSA plays a role in the Secretariat in terms of overseeing the implementation of space-related resolutions, which can take the form of treaties (there are currently five of these).