Paper ID: 20277
oral

26th SYMPOSIUM ON SPACE POLICY, REGULATIONS AND ECONOMICS (E3)
Assuring a Safe, Secure and Sustainable Space Environment for Space Activities (4)

Author: Dr. Peter Martinez
South African Astronomical Observatory, South Africa

ASSURING THE LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY OF OUTER SPACE ACTIVITIES: THE ROLE OF UN COPUOS

Abstract

The UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UN COPUOS)and its two Subcommittees have addressed various aspects of space sustainability under a number of agenda items for several years. At its 52nd session in 2009 the Committee agreed that the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee (STSC) should include, starting from its 47th session in 2010, a new agenda item titled "Long-term sustainability of outer space activities" and it proposed a multi-year work plan that was to culminate in a report on the long-term sustainability of outer space activities and a set of best-practice guidelines for presentation to and review by the Committee.

In 2010, the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee of COPUOS established a Working Group on the Long-Term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities, under the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee. The Terms of Reference for this Working Group mandate it to examine the long-term sustainability of outer space activities in the wider context of sustainable development on Earth, including the contribution of space activities to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, taking into account the concerns and interests of all countries.

The Working Group is tasked to consider current practices, operating procedures, technical standards and policies associated with the long-term sustainability of outer space activities throughout all the phases of a mission life cycle. The Working Group is taking as its legal framework the existing United Nations treaties and principles governing the activities of States in the exploration and use of outer space; it is not considering the development of new legal instruments.

The main outputs of the Working Group will be a report on the long-term sustainability of outer space activities and a consolidated set of voluntary best practice guidelines that could be applied by States, international organizations, national non-governmental organizations and private sector entities to enhance the long-term sustainability of outer space activities for all space actors and for all beneficiaries of space activities.

This paper will present the status of the work of this Working Group and some of the emerging themes. The relationship of this work to other initiatives, such as the UN Group of Governmental Experts on Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures for Outer Space Activities, and the initiative to establish an International Code of Conduct for Outer Space Activities, will also be discussed.