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Assuring the Long-Term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities (4)

Author: Mr. V. Gopala Krishnan
Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO), India, gopal@isro.gov.in

LONG TERM SUSTAINABILITY OF OUTER SPACE ACTIVITIES - LEGAL PERSPECTIVES

Abstract

Outer space era ushered in 1957, has been growing multi dimensionally. The number of space faring nations and space systems dependant nations is on the increase. Further, the agencies engaged in space activities such as space systems development, launch and operations, space systems utilization, space service enablers etc., include not only governmental agencies but many non-governmental agencies too, across the globe. On the applications front, engagement of space systems either directly or indirectly has penetrated in all facets of civilian pursuit of humanity. Thus the fundamental principle of 'space for peaceful purposes' is being more or less achieved. But the fact that space race was originally started under cold war regime with the objective of acquiring and displaying military supremacy in outer space, cannot be ignored. Today, most nations use the space systems for national security/ defence applications. The advantage of engaging space systems encourages certain countries to develop and demonstrate capabilities beyond defensive applications. The space environment is becoming more vulnerable for safe and secured existence and functioning of space systems, due to exponentially increasing number of debris and unexpected / uncontrolled collision of space objects. Ultimately the long term sustainability of outer space activities is under severe stress. The current scenario calls for an orderly performance of outer space activities by every space faring nation, in the interests of all nations. Thus, it becomes imperative that a legal instrument, in whatsoever nature or form, assuring a secured space environment for sustainable development and growth of the humanity, is required to be placed and nurtured through meaningful international cooperation. The ongoing initiative on this important topic through a multiyear Working Group mode in the UNCOPUOS is quite encouraging. It is attempted, through this paper, to analyze the legal perspectives of the options available.