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Assuring a Safe, Secure, and Sustainable Space Environment for Space Activities (4)

Author: Dr. Peter Martinez
University of Cape Town, South Africa, peter.martinez@uct.ac.za

PROGRESS UPDATE ON THE UN COPUOS GUIDELINES FOR SPACE SUSTAINABILITY

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 its Scientific and Technical Subcommittee 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. This 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 legally binding 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 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.

In order to cover the wide range topics within its purview, the Working Group established four expert groups as deliberative fora to consider and propose candidate guidelines for space sustainability. By mid-2013, the expert groups had identified 31 candidate guidelines. At the February 2014 session of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee of UN COPUOS, the Working Group began the process of consolidating these guidelines into a higher-level compilation of guidelines for space sustainability.

This paper will present the latest status of the progress of this Working Group and will draw connections to other related initiatives, such as the UN Group of Governmental Experts on Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures in Outer Space Activities, and the EU initiative to establish an international Code of Conduct for Outer Space Activities.