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50 years after Apollo 11: The future of space exploration and innovation (2)

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UN(OOSA)'S ROLE IN OUTER SPACE ACTIVITIES OF THE FUTURE

Abstract

Since the early stages of humanity's space activities, the United Nations (UN) has played an instrumental role, taking advantage of its unique convening power, in bringing together Member States to jointly consider matters pertinent to the peaceful exploration and use of outer space for the benefit of all nations. To permanently institutionalise this work, the General Assembly established, in 1959, a dedicated subsidiary body - the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS). Since that time, COPUOS and its Subcommittees, with the assistance of the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA), have been able to successfully and timely identify and solve highly complex matters and to develop policy, legal and technical frameworks that enabled truly peaceful and efficient international space cooperation. Its membership has grown from 24 member States in 1959 to, as of January 2019, 92 member States, and 41 international organizations with the permanent observer status. The beginning of XXI century is marked by a notable number of phenomena, problems and challenges in space arena, requiring immediate attention and resolution, such as: dramatic increase in the number and types of actors; the problems of space debris and space traffic management; rational use of resources in space and on celestial bodies; and ensuring peaceful uses of outer space by continual development of new effective international and national frameworks, while checking the existing ones for compatibility with contemporary realities. Finally, it is critically important to ensure that tremendous benefits of space technology and its applications are accessible to all nations on a non-discriminatory basis, and to strengthen the dissemination of relevant knowledge in the developing countries. Moreover, it is also crucial to raise awareness at the global level about all the above-outlined matters. This position paper aims to analyse, from the historical perspective and taking into account the modern topical issues, the relevance of UN(OOSA) in working with matters relating to the exploration and use of outer space for the benefit of humanity. Also, the paper highlights the current status of this work and outlines the plans and goals of the UN in this field. Further, the paper explains how the UN endeavours to address all the above through the identification, development and application of new concepts and mechanisms, while preserving its effectiveness and ensuring that its structure and work remain to be dynamic and flexible among demanding and fast-changing realities of our times.