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ON THE 55TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE RESCUE AGREEMENT: THE DRAFTING HISTORY AND
CONTRIBUTION TO STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Abstract

The Rescue Agreement celebrates its 55th anniversary this year. It was commended by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1967 by a unanimous vote of 115 states. Owing to the highest humanitarian character of this international treaty, the General Assembly requested the depositary governments to open it for signature at the earliest possible date. It was done so in April 1968 and quite promptly, already in December that same year, the Rescue Agreement entered into force and became a true milestone in the evolution of space law and yet another step towards strong international cooperation.

The drafting history of the Rescue Agreement was anything but short and easy. It took almost ten years of lively discussions within the walls of the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, and all of them during the cold war era. The overall geopolitical situation and the challenging events of that time could not but affect the work. Each time the USSR and the US came to understand each other better, the Legal Subcommittee met in an atmosphere of reduced international tension. Meetings that exhibited a promising spirit of cooperation were inevitably followed by periods of complete deadlock. However, even when emotions ran high and any compromise between the two space powers seemed to be unthinkable, it was made absolutely clear that outer space should not become a theatre of cold war. In this regard, one cannot but emphasize the vital role played by a number of the COPUOS members that took part in the discussions. Quite often it was them who helped overcome deadlocks and opened the way to further progress.

This paper will tell about tense negotiations on the Rescue Agreement and diametrically opposed views, however, pointing in the same direction - to the absolute value of human lives and the need for humanism in any circumstances. The Rescue Agreement has not only become an invaluable contribution to the peaceful exploration and use of outer space. It is a vivid example to follow: it is never impossible to reach an agreement if the interests of all humankind are at stake.