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INTEGRATING INDIGENOUS OUTLOOK IN INTERNATIONAL SPACE LAW:
A RELATIONAL APPROACH TO THE ENVIRONMENT

Abstract

International space law, primarily developed under the umbrella of the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, has been instrumental in governing activities in the use and exploration of outer space to date. However, much of the foundational framework and perspectives within these regulations have been developed with a predominantly Western outlook. Recent arguments suggest the need for incorporating diverse worldviews, particularly indigenous perspectives, which often emphasize a holistic and relational understanding of humanity's place within the environment. Indigenous outlooks propose not only an eco-centric relation with the environment but also stress the interconnectedness of all existence, an ethos that could potentially reshape our approach to space exploration. Engaging with Indigenous knowledge systems and laws and centring them in international space law could lead to more sustainable, ethical, and inclusive space activities. The scope of this research encompasses a multi-layered examination of the prevailing international space law framework, with a particular emphasis on its environmental dimensions, aiming to scrutinize how current legal instruments governing outer space address ecological concerns, identifying gaps and potential areas for enhancement in light of sustainable exploration and use of outer space. Central to this study is the incorporation of Indigenous legal principles concerning the natural world as a novel opportunity to welcome the ethos of reciprocity and respect for the environment into space law. For the analysis, the paper will examine the unique case of New Zealand's accession to the Artemis Accords. This instance is noteworthy due to New Zealand's legal acknowledgement of Mori rights, with particular reference to values of stewardship that are crucial for ensuring sustainability and the ethical utilization of space resources. The ultimate objective of this research is to develop well-founded recommendations for amendments or integrative additions to the existing framework of international space law. By deliberately centring Indigenous viewpoints, the proposed research attempts to contribute to the creation of a more inclusive and ecologically conscious regulatory regime for space activities.