

Forum: General Assembly: First Committee

Issue #G1-01: Demilitarising and promoting a sustainable and inclusive use of outer space.

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Introduction

Outer space will be one of the most important tools for humanity's future. Nobody owns space, so learning to cooperate and work as one big team is most certainly going to be important in order to exploit outer space to its full potential, in a healthy and sustainable way that is fair and benefits all nations equally.

Just like Earth, space has laws in order to assure its proper conservation, tasked with admitting and limiting different States' actions in outer space. The benefit of all humankind and maintaining peace are the main pillars for such. States can not send any type of weapons of mass destruction into outer space, and they may also not by any means harmfully contaminate another planet.

The issue is that some Member States are not following current normatives. In November 2021, the Russian Federation, for example, conducted a destructive anti-satellite missile test that created thousands of pieces of debris that are still being collected from outer space. This test threatened the security and wellbeing of the Chinese Space Station. This, and many other threats, like actions that the United States or other nations have taken, are not promoting a sustainable and inclusive use of outer space. Events just like this one should be first in the list of worries of every nation due to the fact that outer space is, and will be for a long time, one of the most important and relevant aids for scientific studies. If space is not taken care of, humanity's next step will not be possible.

Definition of Key Terms

Outer space

Space immediately after the earth's last layer of the atmosphere (exosphere).

Demilitarising

Removing or prohibiting any military presence or action in an area.

Inclusive

Including every Member State and treating them in a fair and equitable manner.

Sustainable development

Development that meets current needs without causing any environmental strains or disrupting future resources.

Outer Space Treaty

This treaty is based on the declaration of Legal Principles governing all ventures of Member States in the exploration and use, in any sense, of outer space. The treaty was open for signature by the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America in early January 1967 and entered into force in October of the same year.

Issue Overview

Demilitarising and promoting a sustainable use of outer space is the key to a cooperative future with high scientific knowledge on what is outside earth. The issue at hand is that some nations are not respecting the current normatives, which exist for the wellbeing of humanity as a whole.

Historical Background

Throughout human history, outer space has been admired and seen as something unreachable for ancient civilisations; however, since the beginning of the "Space era," with the launch of Sputnik I, we know space is accessible to us and we must use it as a tool for scientific investigations.

On October 4, 1957, the world watched how the Soviet Union launched the Sputnik I, the first man-made satellite. That was the beginning of the space race between the US and USSR,

which would last for 18 years and change our perception of the world. By August 1957, the Soviets performed the first test of an intercontinental ballistic missile, with the same rocket that would be used to launch Sputnik two months later. Americans did not want to fall behind, so they accelerated their ongoing space project and launched a satellite in December that same year; the launch was not successful, and the satellite crashed to the ground seconds after takeoff. This event left the US in a shameful position. The Explorer, an American Satellite, was finally launched successfully in 1958. Just when the US was catching up to the Soviets, the USSR sent the first men to space in 1961. In 1962, Project Mercury succeeded and could send the first American man to outer space. The US wanted to stop being in the Soviet's shadow, so, in July 1969, they launched Apollo 11, which allowed Neil Armstrong to become the first man on the moon. In the search for space stations, both countries decided to leave competition aside and consider cooperation. The Apollo-Soyuz craft put an end to this race in 1975, when the two crews met and shook hands.

The message behind this story is as clear as water: before deciding to cooperate, both nations were wasting a lot of resources and time in dangerous projects, most of which resulted in failure. Incredible advancements were made during the race, but more could have been achieved if they cooperated instead. Taking this as a learning experience for the future, humanity should work as a team rather than compete when talking about outer space.

Latest Events

Anti-satellite missile test by the Russian Federation

The Russian Federation has tested a new anti-satellite missile that caused disarray in outer space. The test took place on November 16th, 2021, and resulted in large amounts of debris to circulate across Earth, most of which was not collected- something that risks the wellbeing of astronauts and pre-existing satellites. At the time of the test, four American astronauts were stationed at the International Space Station (ISS), and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) prepared for an emergency evacuation, that in the end was not necessary. US officials condemned the test, calling it irresponsible. NASA said that pieces of debris will be orbiting the Earth for decades, and that these sort of tests are not sustainable and dangerous.

NASA premieres “ARTEMIS” program

NASA unveiled its new ARTEMIS program in 2020, which will try and get the first woman and person of colour on the moon by 2025, in addition to more research as to how to use space inclusively and sustainably. With these new advancements, NASA wishes to break the space barrier and take the next great step: sending astronauts to Mars. The lunar surface will also be explored in unimaginable detail, attempting to enforce the first long term presence on the moon.

Major Parties Involved

United Kingdom

For centuries, the United Kingdom (UK) has played a leading role in observation and exploration of outer space; for today, being part of the new space age. The fast growth of British presence in outer space led to its quick positioning as a major party involved in this issue. The UK Space Agency promotes innovative businesses and highly skilled jobs, boosting research, development and productivity nationwide. Protection of outer space’s sustainability has been one of the pillars of the UK Space Agency, seen by how they support programs such as “The Promoting Space Sustainability Project,” and many more.

United States

The US (United States) has been one of the historical leaders in outer space investigation for decades. Eleven years after NASA was founded, the United States managed to put the first man on the moon, winning the famous “race to the moon” against the Soviet Union. NASA has been the United States’ best aid since its foundation on October first 1958, it has established itself as one of the most supportive parties of The Astronaut rescue and return agreement due to the fact that since the beginning NASA’s third most important goal was to recover both men and spacecrafts back safely to earth.

Russian Federation

Alongside the United States, the Russian Federation has led the way to outer space for decades. On paper, Russia takes part in agreements such as the Outer Space Treaty (OST) and the Liability Convention, but is well known not to respect these.

People's Republic of China

China's secretive and competitive nature has led our knowledge of the Chinese National Space Administration (CNSA) to be very scarce. What is alarming about the CNSA is that it was founded with the purpose of self-defence, unlike NASA or The Russian Federation's which were founded to prove scientific theories and do research. Since 1955, the People's Republic of China has been developing and launching nuclear and non-nuclear weapons into outer space. The United States and its allies have disapproved of this behaviour, calling it "irresponsible and a threat to humanity's wellbeing".

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of Event
October 10th, 1967	Outer Space Treaty (OST) is signed.
December, 1968	The Rescue Agreement, which provides that "States shall take all possible steps to rescue and assist astronauts in distress and promptly return them to the launching State" comes into force.
September, 1972	The Liability Convention comes into force, making Member States liable for any damages regarding outer space affairs both on Earth and Space.
September 15th, 1976	The creation of Convention on Registration of Objects Launched into Outer Space facilitates identification of space objects.
September 10th, 2020	NASA's ARTEMIS program is announced.

November 16th, 2021

The Russian Federation launches an anti-satellite missile test resulting in harmful debris.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

The United Nations has intervened very actively in this matter. The UN understands that this is a topic of mass importance and needs to be addressed immediately. Since the creation of Space Law to various treaties, the United Nations has always supported the use of Space for research in a sustainable and inclusive manner, disapproving totally of the use of outer space for military action and contamination.

The United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) was created as soon as the space era began, created one year after the launch of Sputnik I. This office has always had the same clear and concrete aim: “Bring the benefits of space to the human kind”. Promoting international cooperation in space led to the adoption of the OST. The Office has given 3 UN global conferences on outer space: UNISPACE I, II and III. For over forty years, UNOOSA's programme on Space Applications has provided practical assistance on the use of space technology for peaceful purposes throughout the world in a very inclusive way; this was done mainly through workshops, initiatives, fellowships and regional centres. It also provides space-based information like satellite imagery for the prevention of natural disaster fatalities and emergency response. Safe, sustainable and inclusive development are surely the most important matters for this office.

Past Action

In the past, multiple agreements and conventions have taken place, but the Outer Space Treaty, signed in 1967, stands out between them. This treaty governs the activity of States while exploring or making use of outer space in any way. The OST is the base of all space law and from it came multiple agreements, conventions and regulations. Prior to OST, two resolutions regarding Outer Space were approved: the first prohibited weapons of mass destruction in space, and the second one gave all countries the right to explore space freely and peacefully. At the moment, 106 countries are parties to the treaty, and another 24 have signed but not ratified their approval.

Possible Solutions

Many suggest that more severe space law is the solution to this issue, but this might not be as effective. Harder punishments and threats will not lead to a peaceful coexistence in outer space. The creation of two organisations with different goals regarding outer space would be ideal: The first would be an organisation tasked with providing aid and helping non-developed States to explore and participate in outer space debate. The second one would be tasked strictly with protecting outer space from military activity, using surveillance and getting data from other actual satellites the organisation will detect and take to court the respective nation taking such irresponsible actions.

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