



Statement by South Africa

The 54th Session of the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space

Agenda Item 4: General Exchange of Views

Read by Ambassador Xolisa Mabhongo

3 June 2011

Chairperson

The South African delegation wishes to express its sincere appreciation to see you presiding over the 54th session of COPUOS. Please be assured of my delegation's support for your able leadership in the coming days. Furthermore, my delegation wishes to express its appreciation for the work of UNOOSA under the able leadership of Dr. Mazlan Othman in ensuring the smooth running of this session.

Chairperson

As we commemorate the successes associated with the 50th anniversaries of human space flight and COPUOS, my delegation expresses our sincere sympathies to the victims of recent natural disasters in Japan, the US, Spain and Portugal. My delegation attaches critical significance to the use of space-based technology to mitigate and respond to natural and human-made disasters, as well as the use of space-based technology for the effective management of, for example, climate change, global health and food security.

Chairperson

In this regard, South Africa's aim is to extend the benefits of space technology to rest of the African continent through South-South cooperation, parallel to continuing North-South cooperation in these areas. Therefore, South Africa is pleased with the progress of joint projects between our newly established space agency and space centres in Algeria, Brazil and China.

Chairperson

The South African space landscape is evolving significantly and embraces innovations in space science and technology to address the developmental needs of our country, in particular, and the African continent in general. To that end, a national space regulatory body and, as mentioned earlier, a national space agency are now in place to advance South Africa's space programme.

New members of the South African Council for Space Affairs (SACSA) were appointed in June 2010. SACSA's mandate is to support safe, reliable and sustainable space activities that benefit society through policy and regulatory measures in response to national and international opportunities and challenges. Whereas SACSA is also responsible for ensuring that all South African space related activities are undertaken in compliance with international agreements, the newly established South African National Space Agency (SANSA) is responsible for the implementation of South Africa's space programme and support the creation of industrial development according to government policies.

Chairperson

It is my delegation's pleasure to inform the session that preparations for the 62nd International Astronautical Congress (IAC) that will be held in Cape Town from 3 to 7 October 2011 are progressing well. The IAC enjoys the support of all space-related stakeholders in South Africa, including the government, the private sector and academia. This is the first time that the IAC will be hosted by an African country and South Africa is encouraging African leaders responsible for space science and technology to participate in the IAC. The first day of the Congress is envisaged to be an Africa Space Day, building on the programme of the African Leadership Conference on Space Science and Technology for Sustainable Development (ALC), which will precede the IAC in Kenya in September 2011.

Chairperson

It is, therefore, a pleasure for my delegation to extend a warm invitation to all here to attend the IAC in South Africa. We look forward to welcoming you to South Africa in October.

Chairperson

We are also pleased to announce that the South African bid to host the Square Kilometre Array project (SKA) is fully endorsed by the African Union. The construction of a demonstrator radio telescope called MeerKAT is making good progress. The first seven dishes of the precursor instrument - known as KAT-7 - were completed in December 2010. Once fully completed, MeerKAT will be the largest and most sensitive radio telescope in the southern hemisphere. The South African government fully supports the SKA and regards it as a perfect opportunity to enhance the development of Africa's scientific capacity, research efforts and industrial development.

Chairperson

Involvement in high-tech projects such as MeerKat and the SKA strengthens the diversification and competitiveness of developing countries' space capabilities in their efforts to become knowledge-based economies. Linked to the construction of the MeerKAT telescope is South Africa's capacity building programme open to all African countries to train African technicians, engineers, information technology experts and, ultimately, African astronomers.

Chairperson

My delegation is concerned with the harmful effects of increasing spread of space debris, which amplifies the possibility of collisions in space as well as interference in the operation of space-based objects. It is therefore important that we work together in ensuring that we preserve and sustain space activities that

mitigate the spread of space debris. In this regard, my delegation welcomes the decision of the Working Group on the Long-Term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities for the establishment of the expert groups on this and related matters.

My delegation places great importance to the work of the Scientific and Technical, and the Legal Subcommittees. While we note the good work that has been achieved, we believe that through increased coordination and cooperation the work of these two Subcommittees could be improved. It is, therefore, for this reason that we support keeping the two weeks period allocated to the deliberations of the Legal Subcommittee.

Mr. Chairperson

In conclusion, we are pleased to note the increased participation of African countries in this Committee. We welcome the membership of Tunisia and Ghana's intention to attain membership of COPOUS and ratify the required space-related international agreements.

Finally, I would like to assure you of my delegation's commitment to all efforts in the field of space cooperation and, especially, the value-added effects of space cooperation related to sustainable development, technology transfer and capacity enhancement among developing countries, and between developing and developed countries. We would like to express our sincere hope that this form of cooperation will intensify in the coming years.

Thank you.