



Statement by South Africa

The 50<sup>th</sup> session of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee (11 – 22 February 2013)  
Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space

Delivered by Dr Val Munsami

18 February 2013

Agenda Item 13: Long-Term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities

Mr Chairman, distinguished delegates,

South Africa welcomes the progress that has been made under the agenda item on the Long-Term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities since the last session of this Subcommittee in 2012. The establishment of the four expert groups under the Working Group on the Long-Term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities has proven to be an effective means of considering the wide range of topics in related thematic clusters and allows progress to be made during the inter-sessional periods. We thank all delegations that have expressed their confidence in the leadership of this Working Group chaired by Dr Peter Martinez, a member of our delegation, and we congratulate the eight co-chairs of the four expert groups for their excellent leadership of the work in their respective expert groups. South Africa also appreciates the active participation of many national experts in these expert groups.

As is pointed out in the terms of reference of this Working Group, the long-term sustainability of outer space activities is a matter of concern not only for current and aspiring space actors but for the international community as a whole. The space environment is being used by an increasing number of States, non-governmental organizations and private sector entities. The proliferation of space debris and the possibilities of collisions and interference pose serious threats to the long-term sustainability of space activities, particularly in the low-Earth orbit and geostationary orbit environments. The Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space has a fundamental role in addressing these challenges through its work in the scientific, technical and legal fields.

The terms of reference of the Working Group mandate it to examine the long-term sustainability of outer space activities in the wider context of sustainable development on Earth, including the contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, taking into account the concerns and interests of all countries, in particular those of developing countries, and consistent with the peaceful uses of outer space.

My delegation notes the guidelines to be proposed by the Working Group, though voluntary and non-binding, will set in place particular norms of behaviour in outer space. These will apply just as much to the established space actors as to emerging and aspiring space actors. It is therefore vital that the composition of the expert groups should reflect not only geographical diversity, but must include various levels of development of space capabilities in order to ensure that the guidelines to be adopted do not raise the technical, scientific and financial barriers of entry into space for aspiring space nations.

South Africa calls on all members of COPUOS to engage actively in these discussions, to ensure that the resulting guidelines will enjoy the greatest degree of support by the international community. We appreciate that not all delegations may have the capacity to participate in the various activities of the four expert groups and in this regard, my delegation notes with appreciation the dedicated web page established by the Office of Outer Space Affairs to support the work of the four expert groups and the Working Group as a whole. This website is an excellent tool for keeping up-to-date with the work of the expert groups and is particularly helpful for those delegations that are unable to participate in all the expert groups.

Mr Chairman,

Given the concerns raised by some delegations with respect to the framework potentially limiting activities of emerging space nations, South Africa wishes to emphasize the need for the Working Group to test the framework being developed for Long Term Sustainability against the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. This principle includes two fundamental elements:

- The first addresses the common responsibility of States for the protection of the space environment, or parts of it, at the national, regional and global levels.
- The second concerns the need to take into account the different circumstances, particularly each State's contribution to the evolution of a particular problem and its ability to prevent, reduce and control the extent of that problem.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.