

FACT SHEET

OUTER SPACE AND DISARMAMENT

Efforts in the United Nations to maintain outer space for peaceful purposes began in 1957, months prior to the launch of the first artificial satellite into Earth orbit. Early proposals for prohibiting the use of space for military purposes and the placement of weapons of mass destruction in outer space were considered in the late 1950s and early 1960s by the United Nations.



The existing legal framework

The Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies (“Outer Space Treaty”) entered into force in 1967, after consideration by the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and the General Assembly. The Treaty provides the basic framework for international space law. In particular, it prohibits the placement of nuclear weapons or any other kinds of weapons of mass destruction in outer space and the stationing of such weapons on celestial bodies. It also establishes basic principles related to the peaceful use of outer space. This includes that the exploration and use of outer space shall be carried out for the benefit and in the interests of all

“Security, including in the realm of outer space, is best guaranteed through cooperation and the rule of law, backed by effective and practical measures for verification and enforcement”

Angela Kane, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Statement to the GGE on Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures in Outer Space Activities, July 2012

“[M]ilitary competition in space, if left unimpeded ... could have catastrophic consequences for the outer space environment and could severely disrupt life on the ground.”

Angela Kane, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Statement to the GGE on Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures in Outer Space Activities, July 2012

space and prohibiting the use of anti-satellite weapons. In 2006, the Governments of China and the Russian Federation introduced the draft text of such a treaty to the CD.

The General Assembly has also remained seized of the matter and in 1990 requested the Secretary-General, with the assistance of a group of governmental experts, to carry out a study on the specific aspects related to the application of different confidence-building measures in outer space. That group delivered its report in 1993 (A/48/305).

Building upon renewed political interest in advancing cooperative approaches to questions of outer space security, from 23 to 27 July 2012, the group of governmental experts on transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities, established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 65/68, held its first session in New York.

Towards producing its study, the group reviewed the numerous proposals submitted by Governments in recent years for possible transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space, broadly covering measures related to rules of conduct, measures aimed at expanding the transparency of outer space activities, measures aimed at expanding transparency of space programmes, and mechanisms aimed at resolving concerns.

The next session of the group will take place from 1 to 5 April 2013 in Geneva. The final session of the group will take place from 8 to 12 July 2013 in New York.

The role of the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs

The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs supports all efforts to prevent an arms race in outer space. UNODA serves as the secretariat of the group of governmental experts on transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities and in this capacity provides administrative and substantive support to the group.

countries and that the moon and other celestial bodies shall not be subject to national appropriation or claims of sovereignty.

Current efforts

Since the early 1980s, the Conference on Disarmament (CD) has considered further proposals under the agenda item “prevention of an arms race in outer space”, including draft treaties aimed at, *inter alia*, preventing the placement of weapons in outer

Outer Space Facts

- The number of States parties to the five United Nations treaties governing the peaceful use of outer space are as follows:

Outer Space Treaty: 101
Rescue Agreement: 91
Liability Convention: 88
Registration Convention: 56
Moon Agreement: 13

- Around 50 States and inter-governmental organizations presently operate, either independently or jointly, satellites or other assets in outer space.
- Eleven States and inter-governmental organizations have independently launched objects into outer space.
- Three States are known to have tested anti-satellite weapons.

For more information: www.un.org/disarmament