

**Statement of the Pakistan Delegation at the
66th Session of the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses
of Outer Space
31 May – 09 June 2023**

Agenda Item No. 4. General Exchange of Views

Mr. Chair,

We would like to convey our sincere felicitations to you for continuing your excellent chairpersonship of the 66th session of COPUOS and assure you of our full support in discharging your responsibilities as well as of our cooperation for a very productive session.

We also thank the Secretariat for the excellent arrangements for this Session.

Pakistan joins other delegations in welcoming Guatemala and Uzbekistan as new members of the Committee. The growing interest of countries in the work of this Committee bears witness to its importance and unique role in promoting peaceful uses of outer space.

Pakistan aligns itself with the statement of the Group of 77 and China and have the following remarks to make in our national capacity.

Mr. Chair,

We would like to reaffirm our belief that space is the common heritage of humankind and is not subject to national appropriation by claims of sovereignty. It should be used for peaceful purposes and should remain accessible to all nations on non-discriminatory basis, irrespective of their level of scientific, technical or economic development. In accordance with this belief, Pakistan has ratified all five United Nations space treaties governing the peaceful uses and long term sustainability of outer space.

As a space emerging nation, the prime focus of Pakistan's national space program is the pursuit of sustainable socio-economic progress. Pakistan's growing space capabilities are being used in diverse fields such as agriculture, disaster management, public health, urban planning and water resource management. Pakistan is also engaged in robust cooperation at the international level on peaceful uses of outer space to achieve the key milestones

in the implementation of its National Space Program – 2047. We are also a member of the International Astronautical Federation (IAF), the Committee on Space Research (COSPAR), the Asia-Pacific Space Cooperation Organization (APSCO), and the Asia-Pacific Regional Space Agency Forum (APRSAF).

In addition, SUPARCO, Pakistan's national space agency, hosts the UN-SPIDER Regional Support Office, Mission Control Centre of COSPAS-SARSAT and the Inter-Islamic Network on Space Science & Technology (ISNET). We are also in the process of finalising a National Space Policy to further augment efforts in realising Pakistan's national objectives in the domain of space and achieving SDGs.

Mr. Chair,

The Space 2030 Agenda provides the framework to use space as a driver for sustainable development. The UN Secretary General's report "Our Common Agenda" also acknowledges the importance of peaceful, secure and sustainable use of outer space as being vital for understanding and solving global problems, such as implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and climate action. However, the potential of space as a driver for sustainable development cannot be realised unless the issue of "space divide", which not only persists but continues to widen, is effectively addressed. Developing countries continue to face considerable technical and financial hurdles that prevent them from fully benefiting from space technologies. Robust international cooperation for capacity building, technical assistance and technology transfer are of vital importance to ensure that developing nations can meaningfully enjoy their rights in the exploration, access and use of outer space for sustainable development. This august forum must play its due role in addressing this challenge.

Mr. Chair,

Space is a finite and fragile resource and must be treated as a global commons. Like any other natural resource, it needs to be preserved and protected in a manner so as to ensure equity and access in its uses for all nations. In this context, we attach great importance to the work of the Working Group on Long Term Sustainability to further build on the progress already achieved.

Space traffic management and space debris mitigation are of vital importance for long term sustainability of outer space activities. We are concerned at the ever-increasing number of objects being launched into orbit including mega constellations. We reiterate that space debris mitigation is a

common but differentiated responsibility. Much of the orbital debris which exists today is primarily the consequence of the past and ongoing operations of major space faring nations. It is the major space faring nations, therefore, who should accept the primary responsibility to not only alleviate the situation, but also to assist the developing and space emerging nations, both technically and financially, in meeting space debris mitigation guidelines. We reiterate that the evolving framework on long term sustainability must not impose undue and unreasonably high standards and obligations which might be prejudicial to the interests of developing and space emerging countries by limiting their access.

Mr. Chair,

With the ongoing technological advancements, exploration, exploitation and utilisation of space resources are becoming a distinct possibility. The international legal system, however, continues to lag behind. Pakistan, therefore, welcomes the establishment of the Working Group on Legal Aspects of Space Resources Activities and the adoption of its detailed work plan and methods of work. We believe that the normative and legal framework governing exploration, exploitation and utilisation of space resources must be consistent with existing international space law i.e. five UN space treaties particularly the Outer Space Treaty and fully respect the principles of non-appropriation and equitable access.

The current dispensation governing the utilisation of the geostationary orbit which is based on the principle of first-come-first-served is far from perfect in ensuring equitability and is not well attuned to the interests of developing countries with fledgling space capacities. COPUOS and its subcommittees should play their due role in attempting to address this complicated issue which hinders the access of developing countries to the geostationary orbit on an equitable basis.

Mr. Chair,

Pakistan expresses its concern at the emerging trend towards unilateral national legislation governing space activities which may be at odds with international instruments and obligations. Similarly, while voluntary norms to regulate behaviour in space are useful, they cannot be a substitute for legally binding instruments. The international legal regime governing and regulating space activities needs to evolve in order to ensure the rule of law in outer space; safety, security and sustainability of space operations; as well as equitable access to space for all states without any discrimination.

Mr. Chair,

Pakistan has been a strong and consistent proponent of the Prevention of Arms Race in Outer Space. We are against the weaponization of outer space in all its possible manifestations. It is disappointing to note that countries are already treating space as a war-fighting domain and building relevant military capabilities. Similarly, anti-satellite tests, not least because of their debris generating effect, remain a matter of grave concern. We believe that there is a need to address gaps in the international space laws with a view to ensuring that no one threatens peaceful activities and applications of space technologies for socio-economic development.

Mr. Chair,

Global Navigation Satellite Systems have become an integral part of our societies and economies. In this regard, Pakistan views the International Committee on Global Navigation Satellite Systems (ICG) as making a valuable contribution to sustainable development by promoting compatibility, interoperability and transparency among different satellite navigation systems. This important committee's work holds particular relevance to developing countries such as Pakistan which are interested in using GNSS for socioeconomic growth and sustainable development and attaches great importance to GNSS applications. Pakistan has long been participating in the ICG's meetings as an observer.

In order to further enhance its cooperation with the ICG, Pakistan applied for its membership in 2021. Our application was strongly supported by all members of the Committee on its technical merits except for one member which refused to join consensus for extraneous, political reasons.

Pakistan understands that the objective and *raison d'être* of the ICG is to facilitate and promote compatibility, interoperability and transparency among different GNSSs through constructive and good faith engagement among its members. The ICG will not be able to pursue its stated objectives effectively if countries, which can contribute to its technical work, continue to be excluded for short-sighted political point scoring. We hope that technical considerations will retain merit and Pakistan can finally join this important platform at the earliest.

Mr. Chair,

In conclusion, we look forward to a fruitful exchange of views among member states during this session of the Committee.

I thank you.
