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Statement by Austria
Ambassador Gabriela Sellner

60th LSC

AGENDA ITEM 10

**General exchange of information and views on legal mechanisms relating to
space debris mitigation and remediation measures, taking into account the work of
the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee**

04 JUNE 2021

Madame Chair, Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Austria underlines its commitment to safeguard the long-term use of the outer space environment for peaceful purposes. The continuous growth of space debris in the earth's orbit has become a challenge to the safety and sustainability of space activities.

Space debris does not only pose a risk of damage or destruction to vessels and installations in space, it can also endanger human life and health on earth. The mitigation of space debris is therefore a concern for Austria. Under our national space legislation, the obligation to mitigate space debris plays an important role in the authorization of national space activities.

At the international level guidelines and standards for mitigating space debris were developed, in particular the ***Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines of the Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee (IADC)*** and the ***UNCOPUOS Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines***.

Research and development of space debris removal and in-orbit maintenance technologies were initiated in recent years. International guidelines and standards in these areas comprise ***the UNCOPUOS Guidelines for the Long-Term Sustainability of Space Activities, the Best Practices for Sustainability of Space Operations of the Space Safety Coalition, and the Guiding Principles and Design and Operational Practices of the Consortium for Execution of Rendezvous and Servicing Operations (CONFERS)***.

The guidelines and standards indicate of what is to be considered a desirable, reasonable and responsible behavior in the conduct of space activities. They establish a standard of care and due diligence against which the behavior of space actors can be assessed.

In addition to space debris mitigation, the remediation of space debris is also an issue of importance to Austria. In our opinion future discussions on space debris in the framework of UNCOPUOS could therefore **focus on the issues of space debris remediation as well as on-orbit servicing and on risks of large satellite constellations with regard to the generation of space debris**. These discussions should aim to develop at the intergovernmental level a set of more detailed guidelines, which could include technical and safety standards as well as legal aspects.

The existing legal framework provides a certain regulatory basis for the mitigation and remediation of space debris. In particular, it provides for international responsibility of states in cases of unlawful conduct and contains rules on liability.

In Austria's view, however, additional rules to complement the existing law, in particular on the following issues are desirable:

- Procedures in the case of unregistered debris objects;
- Modalities for the identification, tracking and characterisation of space debris objects, as well as for the sharing of the relevant information;
- Modalities for assessing the risk posed by space debris objects as well as space debris mitigation, remediation or servicing activities;
- Clear obligations for space debris mitigation, remediation and in-orbit maintenance activities;
- Conditions and modalities under which disposal and maintenance operations may be lawfully carried out;
- Technical standards for carrying out remediation or maintenance work.

We believe that this Subcommittee has a crucial role in addressing these issues and we therefore support a continued dialogue on the topics of **space debris mitigation and remediation** as well as **on-orbit servicing** in the Legal Subcommittee.

Thank you!