

USA, AGENDA ITEM 7 A&B

DEFINITION AND DELIMITATION OF OUTER SPACE AND THE CHARACTER AND UTILIZATION OF THE GEOSTATIONARY ORBIT

STATEMENT BY EMILY PIERCE, U.S. REPRESENTATIVE TO THE LEGAL SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE UN COMMITTEE ON THE PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE

March 29, 2022

Thank you, Chair. The United States appreciates the opportunity to present its views on matters relating to the definition and delimitation of outer space and to the character and utilization of the geostationary orbit, including consideration of ways and means to ensure the rational and equitable use of the geostationary orbit without prejudice to the role of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

The United States has expressed its views on these issues in the past, and those views have not changed. With respect to matters relating to the definition and delimitation of outer space, the United States continues to hold the view that there is no need to seek a legal definition or delimitation for outer space. The current framework has presented no practical difficulties and activities in outer space are flourishing as we have heard already this session. Given this situation, an attempt to define or delimit outer space would be an unnecessary theoretical exercise that could unintentionally complicate existing activities and that might not be able to adapt to continuing technological developments. The current framework

has served everyone well, and we should continue to operate under it until there is a demonstrated need and a practical basis for developing a definition or delimitation. It is worth noting that some federal states within the United States have adopted or proposed definitions of “outer space” or related concepts for their own purposes, such as regulatory compliance or tax laws. These actions do not relate to, and are not evidence of, the existence of a definition of outer space under international law.

With respect to the geostationary orbit, or GSO, the United States continues its commitment to equitable access to the GSO for all States, including satisfaction of the requirements of developing countries for GSO use and satellite telecommunications generally.

As we have stated, the United States is committed to equitable access to the GSO and has taken numerous actions to further the use of the GSO, and other uniquely situated orbits, for the benefit of all. These actions include: free provision of its Global Positioning System (GPS); free provision of a variety of weather and warning data from its meteorological satellites; provision of information from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) polar meteorological satellites; and provision of data from the Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellites, including information about hurricanes, volcanic eruptions and effluent flooding, droughts and related

environmental matters, and storm tracking data. Additionally, the United States participates in the international satellite-aided search and rescue program known as COSPAS-SARSAT, as a means for ships, aircraft, and others in distress to signal their need for help and their locations.

Thank you, Chair.