

AGENDA ITEM 11

GENERAL EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION AND VIEWS ON LEGAL MECHANISMS RELATING TO SPACE DEBRIS MITIGATION MEASURES, TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE WORK OF THE SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBCOMMITTEE

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

March 24, 2023

Chair, the United States welcomes the continued exchange of information regarding legal mechanisms related to space debris mitigation measures. We want to acknowledge the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee's (STSC) continuation of its important efforts on the Long-Term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities (LTS) through the establishment of its second Working Group and transition from the content of the guidelines to national implementation and capacity building. The United States commends the dedication of the Working Group Chair, Mr. Umamaheswaran of India, for leading these conversations at STSC during informal consultations in November 2022, and the upcoming June plenary session.

The United States has long recognized the importance of managing the creation and effects of space debris and will support efforts to evolve those practices to ensure continued safety of flight operations in the future. Those U.S. Government departments and agencies that participate in, and license, outer space activities have a robust framework of statutes, regulations, and internal policies that take into account space debris mitigation, tracking and

characterization, and remediation from the design stage of a satellite or space launch system to its end-of-life disposal.

For example, a part of its proceeding on “Mitigation of Orbital Debris in the New Space Age,” the Federal Communications Commission adopted amendments to existing rules on September 23, 2020, and again on September 29, 2022, including adding a requirement that satellites in low-Earth orbit authorized by the FCC be de-orbited within five years following the end of their mission. The FCC is proceeding with further activities under FCC Dockets IB 18-313 and 22-271. Further details on the status of this rulemaking can be obtained directly from www.fcc.gov.

We are encouraged that many Member States and intergovernmental organizations have developed debris guidelines, and we believe that the implementation by even more spacecraft operators is vital to the safety and long-term sustainability of space flight. At last year’s session, the United States recalled with regret one Member State’s destruction of an on-orbit spacecraft in direct contradiction to Guideline 4: “Avoid intentional destruction and other harmful activities” of the Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Space”. The long-lived debris generated by that irresponsible action continues to threaten satellites and other space objects that are vital to all nations’ security, economic, and scientific interests for years to come, as well as significantly increase the risk to the human spaceflight activities of all nations.

Therefore, the United States would like to thank the many Member States here that helped to adopt UN General Assembly Resolution 77/41, which calls on all States to commit not to conduct destructive direct-ascent antisatellite missile tests. We note that this commitment is not solely a security issue, but also directly contributes to the long-term sustainability of the outer space environment and enables the ongoing peaceful exploration and use of outer space. We call upon all UNCOPUOS Members-to consider making this commitment.

The United States continues to work towards implementing the UN COPUOS Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines and the Long-Term Sustainability Guidelines associated with minimizing and mitigating the effects of space debris because of our strong interest in the safety and long-term sustainability of space activities, and our judgment that these practices represent sound approaches to debris mitigation. The United States provided detailed information regarding our implementation during the STSC in February. The United States has also developed six overarching national policies, an R&D strategy and action plan, and cost benefit analyses related to debris mitigation, tracking and characterization, and remediation.

As delegations are no doubt aware, approaches to mitigating, tracking and characterization, and remediation debris are linked to evolving technologies. As technologies change, so too do the available methods for debris mitigation, tracking and characterization, and remediation as well as the cost-benefit tradeoffs of doing so. Given the evolving technical aspects of debris mitigation,

tracking and characterization, and remediation and the practical, economic reality that existing platforms cannot be replaced overnight, we do not see the wisdom in codifying specific debris mitigation standards into international law at this time.

Safety and sustainability in space are of paramount importance for the United States, and we will continue to support wholeheartedly international cooperation to further debris mitigation technology and techniques.

Thank you, Chair.