

Agenda Item 10 – 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

Mr Chair, thank you for giving me the floor. The Kingdom of the Netherlands wishes to take this opportunity to speak to this agenda-item to underscore the importance of measures to remediate the effects of space debris in outer space.

Mr Chair, distinguished delegates, the Outer Space Treaty speaks of the freedom of access to outer space. It falls upon us to ensure that this does not become illusory. The freedom of access is not limited in time, and must also be available for future generations. The freedom of access to outer space presupposes access to outer space. It also presupposes safe and sustainable access to outer space. Space debris poses an existential threat to this, and we must take all efforts to do two things. First, we must ensure that future space operations do not create further debris. Second, we must diminish the existing amount of space debris.

As also committed to by the signatories of the Artemis Accords, States should implement post-mission disposal measures, and to prevent the creation of new debris. In addition, States should implement the active removal of space debris. The Kingdom of the Netherlands has implemented space debris measures in its national space legislation and all licensees need to comply with the measures which are included in the Space Debris Compendium to ensure the long-term sustainability of the space environment. We are in the process of reviewing our national space law, to ensure that it remains up to date with respect to the space debris mitigation measures, as reflected in the Long Term Sustainability Guidelines and the Compendium.

The intentional creation of space debris, in this day and age and at this level of development, is irresponsible, and frankly, unlawful. ASAT tests constitute the most glaring example of the disregard for the safety and sustainability of outer space activities. The deliberate, and unnecessary, destruction of a space object in outer space is unlawful. My government has joined the growing number of States, creating undeniable international consensus, declaring a moratorium on ASAT tests. However, also the incidental, but preventable, permanent loss of control over a space object would be unlawful. Such an object may become space debris itself, or cause collisions, that in turn create further long-lived space debris. As such, the issue of space debris is closely connected to that of Space Traffic Management. The Kingdom of the Netherlands would therefore recommend that space traffic management measures are taken also with the view to taking space debris mitigation measures.

I thank you for your attention.