

**Statement by the European Organisation for Astronomical Research in the Southern Hemisphere (ESO) to the 57<sup>th</sup> Session of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee of United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space**

Madam Chair, Distinguished Delegates,

It is a great honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the European Organisation for Astronomical Research in the Southern Hemisphere, known as ESO.

We would like to offer our warmest congratulations to you, Madame Chair, on your election as Chairwoman. We are confident that the work of the Committee will benefit from your experience and leadership.

Madame Chair,

I'm pleased to report to the Committee that ESO's astronomy programmes are on a strong footing. Thanks to the support of our 16 Member States under the framework of our intergovernmental treaty, our Host State Chile, and Australia—our strategic partner, ESO continues to be the world's most productive astronomical observatory, providing a range of world leading astronomical facilities to astronomers from around the world.

The construction of the Extremely Large Telescope is underway, with over 90% of the contractual value of this Billion-Euro-class project making progress in industry. With a primary mirror of 39m in diameter, the Extremely Large Telescope will be the world's largest optical and infrared telescope at its 'first light' in the middle of the decade.

We are continuing also to support and develop the Atacama Large Millimetre / Sub-Millimetre Array, or ALMA, which is an international partnership among Europe, represented by ESO, North America and East Asia, in cooperation with the Republic of Chile. Ms Di Pippo referred in her opening statement to the now iconic image of the black hole released last year – it was the commitment of many nations to this ambitious ALMA partnership, which together with other radio-telescopes, made this amazing result possible. Last but not least, the Very Large Telescope and its interferometer the VLTI continue to be at the forefront of optical astronomy.

Madame Chair,

Today, I would like to talk briefly about the role of astronomical science in our collective endeavour in this Committee. We all recognise the great value that astronomy plays in providing critical functions to space exploration and space science, in stimulating interest in scientific and technical studies and careers, and in building national capacity towards a space capability.

I would like to close with a reflection on the increasing number of artificial space objects, particularly satellite mega-constellations placed in low earth orbit, which have the goal to provide communications to underserved areas. While these developments present both challenges and opportunities, the astronomy community has raised concerns about the possible impact on our ability to conduct fundamental science.

Tomorrow there will be a technical presentation by the International Astronomical Union on this specific subject.

ESO supports the role of this Committee and its Member States to develop frameworks that will ensure the harmonious coexistence of the use of low Earth orbit with the conditions that both enable humankind to continue its observation and understanding of the Universe, and that safeguard our cultural and natural heritage right to a pristine night sky.

Madame Chair, Distinguished Delegates, thank you for your kind attention.