

Statement by SMPAG Chair to STSC 59th session

Mister Chair, distinguished delegates,

Thank you for the opportunity to address this Subcommittee. As this is my first time to address this Subcommittee in my capacity as the new Chair of the Space Mission Planning Advisory Group (SMPAG), on behalf of the European Space Agency, allow me to express sincere thanks to my predecessor and distinguished colleague Gerhard Drolshagen, who has chaired SMPAG on behalf of the European Space Agency tirelessly since the SMPAG establishment in 2014. I'm pleased to continue this work and to inform you about the progress of our work since the last session of this Subcommittee.

Mister Chair, distinguished delegates,

Since the last session of this Subcommittee, SMPAG held two meetings in a virtual format, the 17th meeting on 13 – 14 October 2021 and the 18th meeting on 9–10 February 2022, in conjunction with this session of this Subcommittee. SMPAG is Chaired by the European Space Agency (elected to chair the Group by 2022) and supported by the Office for Outer Space Affairs as the secretariat to SMPAG.

Mister Chair, distinguished delegates,

The year 2021 has seen promising advancements in the area of near-Earth objects and planetary defence. In April, the 7th IAA Planetary Defense Conference was held, hosted by UNOOSA, in cooperation with ESA that brought together close to 700 participants in a virtual 5-day meeting, and hosted several heads of space agencies who in a dedicated panel reiterated support for international cooperation in planetary defence efforts. In November 2021, the first-ever planetary defence technology demonstration mission, DART (Double Asteroid Redirection Test) mission, was launched that will demonstrate a kinetic impact orbit deflection technique.

At its meetings, SMPAG regularly exchange information on-going and planned activities of its members related to planetary defence, both from the technical and policy point of view. SMPAG also took note of an initiative that builds upon the unique opportunity of a close approach by asteroid Apophis in 2029 to look at possibilities for an UN-designated international year of asteroid awareness in 2029. A small working group comprising interested

members and observers of SMPAG and IAWN has been set up to work on the proposal.

Mister Chair, distinguished delegates,

As announced at our last reporting, SMPAG in 2021 initiated its first hypothetical impact threat exercise, under the lead of the Italian space agency ASI and Politecnico of Milano members of the SMPAG, to test the Group's real-world capabilities to support planetary defence in case of a real threat. The primary objective of this exercise is to simulate a case of hypothetical threat caused by an asteroid and focus on the SMPAG procedures to develop a coordinated advise for a response to such impact threat. The objective includes defining the tasks required for a SMPAG coordinated response; which entity or entities could be responsible for these tasks, and sharing best practices on internal procedures of SMPAG members in case of an impact threat. The tasks will cover the technical aspects related to the design of a deflection or reconnaissance missions as well as the procedural aspects within SMPAG. The exercise will run through 2022 with SMPAG delegations and space agencies involved, and we will inform the Subcommittee about the results.

Mister Chair, distinguished delegates,

As the IAWN coordinator before me reported, both the International Asteroid Warning Network and the Space Mission Planning Advisory Group continue to grow in membership and strengthened international collaboration to build preparedness in case of a potential impact hazard by a NEO.

SMPAG at present has 19 members and 7 permanent observers, with the Secure World Foundation joining SMPAG as the latest new observer. We also received a membership application from Brazil, its space agency and are hoping to have their delegation present their application at our next meeting, scheduled for September 2022.

I would like to encourage other States members of the Committee to join our work and become a SMPAG member. The SMPAG Terms of Reference are available at our webpage smpag.net. A letter addressed to the SMPAG Chair, with a copy to the Secretariat, is required to indicate your intention to join our work. All the meeting minutes as well as other informative documents, such as workplan, are available on the webpage of SMPAG at smpag.net.

Mister Chair, distinguished delegates, thank you for your kind attention.

