

**Statement by Kevin Conole, United States Representative,
on Agenda Item 12, “Near-Earth Objects,”
February 10, 2022**

Thank you, Mr. Chair. The United States appreciates the opportunity to share its most recent activities for discovery and research on Near-Earth Objects, or NEOs. The NASA Planetary Defense Coordination Office leads U.S. efforts to detect, track and study hazardous NEOs. This office would also lead coordination of efforts by the U.S. Government for a response to any impact threat, working closely with our international partners.

As of January of this year, international efforts led by NASA-sponsored NEO search teams are approaching a significant milestone in the search for near-Earth asteroids (or NEAs), having discovered almost 28,000 asteroids of all sizes whose orbits could allow them to come relatively close to Earth.

Last November, NASA launched the Double Asteroid Redirection Test or DART mission. The purpose of DART is to demonstrate that the path of an asteroid through space can be changed using a kinetic impactor: a spacecraft that is deliberately crashed into the asteroid at high speed. DART will be humanity’s first attempt to perceptibly alter the motion of a natural celestial body, and that alteration will be measured using telescopes on Earth, many that are operated by international partners in this mission. This test, conducted on an asteroid that does not pose any danger to Earth, is intended to show that kinetic impact is a viable technique that could be deployed someday to prevent an asteroid from hitting the Earth, should an asteroid on an Earth-impacting trajectory ever be discovered. The impact will take place on September 26 this year, followed by several weeks of observations to collect data on the effects on the orbit. Planetary defense is an international concern; DART carries a CubeSat contributed by Italy and the DART team is drawing on expertise from around the world to evaluate the mission’s results and enable planning for future planetary defense efforts.

Mr. Chair, the United States actively contributes to the International Asteroid Warning Network, or IAWN, and the Space Mission Planning Advisory Group, or SMPAG. These groups provide a strong foundation for international cooperation among space agencies and scientific and technical institutes to detect and deal with the natural impact hazard.

Last April, the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) hosted the 7th International Planetary Defense Conference in a virtual environment.

Participants around the world joined this biennial gathering, including leaders of national space agencies. We are pleased that UNOOSA has already graciously agreed to host the next Planetary Defense Conference at the Vienna International Center in April 2023.

Mr. Chair, the United States continues work called for in its Action Plan for the U.S. National NEO Preparedness Strategy. Like other space-related U.S. national policies, the NEO Strategy specifically mentions the importance of the work of the UN Committee on the Peaceful Use of Outer Space and its subcommittees. The United States continues its efforts to detect and avoid the rare but potentially globally devastating effects of an asteroid impact. We look forward to increased international cooperation to address the impact hazard from space through participation in IAWN and SMPAG. These groups are thriving with a growing number of members as our scientific, NEO-related coordination continues to improve. Because of the time constraints, I have provided a just a few updates in this statement, but will provide our entire planned statement online. Thank you, Mr. Chair.