

Statement by Richard Buenneke, United States Representative
Agenda Item 13, “Long Term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities”
Scientific and Technical Subcommittee
United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space
February 8, 2022

Mister Chair, the United States welcomes the chance to present its views under this agenda item.

As the United States Space Priorities Framework notes, the United States remains committed to engaging the international community to uphold and strengthen a rules-based international order for space. Working with both American industry and international partners, the United States will:

- Continue to demonstrate how the full range of governmental and private sector activities can be conducted in a responsible, peaceful, and sustainable manner; and
- Lead in the development and implementation of open, transparent, and credible international standards, policies, and best practices that establish the foundation for global space traffic coordination.

Since the last session of this Subcommittee, U.S. Government agencies and private sector entities have made a number of important advances relating to space sustainability. During this session, the United States will make a technical presentation entitled “Update on the Consortium for Execution of Rendezvous and Servicing Operations.” This presentation provides a concrete example of the U.S. commitment to the development of operational best practices and standards and the critical role of the private sector in those initiatives.

Other progress by the United States relating to space sustainability since the previous STSC session includes:

- Continued improvements to U.S. Government and commercial space situational awareness capabilities to detect, track, and identify both active space objects and debris;

- Increased timeliness of U.S. registration of space objects with the UN Secretary-General;
- Expanded government-commercial partnerships to increase communications, exchange data, and establish best practices for autonomous spacecraft collision avoidance; and
- Co-sponsored a work item proposal in the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) on space traffic coordination.

Mister Chair, the United States looks forward to providing further details on these and other U.S. efforts to enhance space sustainability at future sessions of the Subcommittee. U.S. governmental, non-governmental, and commercial experts also will continue to participate in other international exchanges, including the United Kingdom-sponsored effort to advance global awareness on space sustainability and foster tailored capacity-building services for emerging spacefaring nations.

For the United States, these and other efforts highlight the importance of a sincere and sustained commitment by all nations to the implementation of both the USpace Debris Mitigation Guidelines and the Preamble and 21 Long-Term Sustainability Guidelines (“LTS guidelines”) which were respectively adopted by this Committee in 2007 and 2019.

In this regard, the United States recalls with regret one Member State’s recent destruction of an on-orbit space object. This action was in direct contradiction to UN Space Debris Mitigation Guideline 7: “Avoid intentional destruction and other harmful activities.” As the United States and many other nations have stated, the long-lived debris generated by this dangerous and irresponsible action will threaten satellites and other space objects that are vital to all nations’ security, economic, and scientific interests for decades to come. In addition, it will significantly increase the risk to the human spaceflight activities of all nations.

Human spaceflight safety can also be enhanced by effective implementation of LTS guidelines for “Safety of space operations.” The United States specifically highlights Guidelines B.1, B.2, B.3, B.4 and B.8 as having particular relevance. The United States also urge all nations – in

particular those with human spaceflight missions – to provide updated contact information and share information on space objects and orbital events to better support collaborative analysis of high-risk conjunctions and options for collision avoidance.

Mister Chair, given the fast pace of space developments and resulting challenges to space sustainability, the United States believes that completion of a terms of reference, methods of work, and workplan for the second working group on the long-term sustainability of outer space activities must be a top priority for this STSC session.

In this regard, my delegation wishes to express our appreciation to the LTS Working Group chair, Mr. Umamaheshwaran of India, and the Secretariat for the progress made during intersessional meetings in November and last week.

My delegation looks forward to commencing efforts to obtain information and views on the practical implementation of the 21 adopted LTS guidelines, the study of new challenges and possible new guidelines, and capacity-building efforts. This will allow the group to conduct substantive deliberations at the 60th STSC session with the goal of completing a report to the 63rd session of the Subcommittee in 2026.

Thank you, Mister Chair.