

UK Statement at Scientific and Technical Sub-committee of the
Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) for
Agenda Item 14 – Future Role of the Committee, 7-18 February 2022

Chair,

Please allow me to set out the view of the United Kingdom on the future role of COPUOS. As you know, the United Kingdom has taken a leading role on both the space sustainability agenda and that for space security. COPUOS has a crucial role in ensuring the ongoing sustainability of the space environment.

It can monitor the implementation of the Guidelines for the Long-Term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities and support countries.

It can set the international framework for safe space operations, listening to member states and their academics, companies and scientists.

It can support safe and sustainable space exploration; help address climate change; discuss peaceful uses of nuclear power sources in outer space; and encourage sustainable development, including achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

And it can, and does, look for ways to set new standards, regulations and rules to support new activities, such as for in-situ space resource utilisation.

These should ensure the space environment can be used by all nations to support their development and their socio-economic prosperity.

We will continue to be active in COPUOS, and in support of UNOOSA, to maintain a sustainable space environment. That includes the funding we provided for an LTS project on implementation, through the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA).

But one thing COPUOS cannot do is to engage in discussions about threats to space systems from States. As you know, space systems include satellites, ground infrastructure and the signals and data that flow between these. States have developed and deployed weapons to target these space systems and to threaten the security of States.

But discussion of weapons is for the UN disarmament structures. COPUOS should not blur the lines with the disarmament community.

So the United Kingdom will continue to engage actively in discussions under the agenda item of Preventing an Arms Race in Outer Space at the Conference on Disarmament and the UN Disarmament Commission. We were delighted with the overwhelming support again this year for our UNGA resolution on "Reducing Space threats through norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviour" at the UN General Assembly First Committee . The report from the UN Secretary General last year and the Open Ended Working Group that is set up for 2022 show how responsible space behaviours can reduce the risk of miscalculation and conflict arising from threats from States against our space systems.

Chair, let us not confuse these two very different strands of work and forums. One, COPUOS, looks to maintain space for all nations to use. The other, UN disarmament, seeks to prevent escalation and conflict that could arise from the use of weapons against space systems. They need to be dealt with separately.

Finally Chair, the UK believes that COPUOS should continue to be agile and receptive to the increasing number of actors in outer space. To ensure that the development of the global governance of outer space is transparent, COPUOS should consider new and novel ways to best engage relevant stakeholders, such as industry, academia and civil society actors, in our joint endeavours.

Thank you.