

Statement by SMPAG Chair to STSC 60th session

Mister Chair, distinguished delegates,

Thank you for the opportunity to address this Subcommittee. As Chair of the Space Mission Planning Advisory Group (SMPAG) on behalf of ESA, I'm pleased to inform delegations about our work progress.

Mister Chair, distinguished delegates,

As pointed out by the IAWN Coordinator in a statement before me, this year not only marks 10 years since IAWN and SMPAG were endorsed, but also 10 years since the Chelyabinsk asteroid impact occurred in February 2013. The asteroid was small, about 20 meters across, and partially disintegrated in the atmosphere. Still, it served as a reminder that even relatively small asteroids can cause damage. It is therefore important that we continue to strengthen our efforts at the international level.

Mister Chair, distinguished delegates,

The purpose of SMPAG is to prepare for an international response to a near-Earth object (NEO) impact threat through the exchange of information, development of options for collaborative research and mission opportunities, and NEO threat mitigation planning activities.

SMPAG is comprised of space agencies, and we currently have 18 members and 7 observer organizations. Both SMPAG and IAWN report to this Subcommittee on an annual basis. SMPAG is chaired by the European Space Agency (re-elected for the period 2023-2025). The UN Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) acts as Secretariat to SMPAG, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 71/90.

Mister Chair, distinguished delegates,

SMPAG usually meets twice per year. Since our last report, SMPAG held its 19th meeting in October 2022 virtually, and its 20th meeting in conjunction with this session of the Subcommittee, on 8-9 February. We are very pleased to report that at this meeting, we were joined by representatives from the Canadian Space Agency (CSA), Indian Space Agency (ISRO) and the Kenya Space Agency (KSA), and we noted the indication of their interest to join SMPAG.

I would like to invite space agencies from other member States to join SMPAG. Please feel free to reach out to UNOOSA as the Secretariat. The SMPAG Terms of Reference and other informative documents are available at our webpage: smpag.net.

Mister Chair, distinguished delegates,

In 2021, SMPAG initiated its first hypothetical impact threat exercise, led by the Italian Space Agency ASI and Politecnico di Milano. The primary objective of this exercise is to simulate the case of a hypothetical threat caused by an asteroid. It focuses on SMPAG procedures to develop a coordinated advice for a response. We completed the first phase of the exercise focusing on national procedures. The second phase kicked-off during this meeting and will concentrate on the coordination of tasks among members. I would like to thank ASI for taking the lead on this.

The SMPAG Ad hoc Working Group on Legal Issues also resumed its work at this meeting.

Mister Chair, distinguished delegates,

2022 has seen promising advancements in the area of near-Earth objects, including the first ever demonstration of a kinetic impact deflection technique, called DART. SMPAG also noted the international collaboration in that mission, including world-wide follow-up observations.

SMPAG also took note of an initiative that builds upon the unique opportunity of the close approach by asteroid Apophis in 2029: Namely to look at possibilities for UN-designated international year of planetary defence in 2029.

Mister Chair, distinguished delegates,

Allow me at the end to invite delegations to the 2023 IAA Planetary Defense Conference that will take place here at the Vienna International Centre and at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, from 3-7 April 2023. The registration is open at the IAA webpage. We would like to take this opportunity of having the conference in Vienna to further raise awareness among Member States about the importance of international collaboration to build preparedness in case of an asteroid impact hazard.

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