



STATEMENT BY THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBCOMMITTEE

SIXTIETH SESSION

6 – 10 February 2023

AGENDA ITEM NO 17: DARK AND QUIET SKIES

**Delivered by Ms Pragashnie Adurthy
Counsellor: South African Permanent Mission to the UN in Vienna**

Chair,

As indicated in our national statement, South Africa is home to several large optical and radio telescopes and we are proud to inform the subcommittee that the MeerKAT team in South Africa was honored with the 2023 Group Achievement Award from the Royal Astronomical Society (RAS) which encourages and promotes the study of astronomy, solar-system science, geophysics, and related branches of science.

We consider preserving dark and radio-quiet skies an imperative in furthering our study of the heavens and celestial bodies. It is for this reason that South Africa is co-sponsoring the Conference Room Paper on the Protection of Dark and Quiet Skies for Science and Society. We have also heard several other delegations expressing their support for this agenda item, highlighting a shared understanding of the critical importance of protecting the night sky for both the present and future generations.

South Africa supports the recommendation made to maintain the item on Dark and Quiet Skies on the agenda of the STSC and as well establish an Expert Group to explore how to mitigate this growing challenge. This agenda item would offer an adequate forum for relevant stakeholders to present and discuss their respective positions on the matter, provide technical updates, and modifications.

Chair,

South Africa is a member of the International Astronomical Union Centre for the Protection of the Dark and Quiet Sky from Satellite Constellation Interference (CPS). The global astronomy community is troubled by measurements that revealed BlueWalker 3, a low Earth orbiting satellite, is now one of the brightest objects in the night sky. The satellite's use of terrestrial frequencies poses a new challenge to radio astronomy, and is in contravention of both international and national regulations. It is the wish of South Africa, that BlueWalker 3 preserves the night sky.

In this regard, South Africa is exploring the impact of BlueWalker 3 on the Karoo Radio Quiet Zone, currently protected through National Legislations. It is along similar lines; South Africa expresses concern over the impact of light reflected luminosity on its telescopes as well as any adverse impact on cultural astronomy and is of the view that the Expert Group is a timely construction to address growing concerns of this nature.

Chair,

The lessons learned in other parts of the world will become helpful in efforts to protect the telescopes in South Africa and South Africa will also examining the feasibility of establishing coordination agreements with multinational organisations that have launched or are planning to launch satellite constellations in mainly low Earth Orbits.

To conclude, we are of the firm view that maintaining the agenda of the Protection of Dark and Quiet Skies along with the establishment of an expert Group will allow for more focused discussions on how to address current and emerging challenges that threaten our understanding of the universe.

Thank you.