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Scientific and Technical Subcommittee

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Agenda item 7

Space debris

Draft report of the Working Group on Space Debris

1. In accordance with paragraph 17 of General Assembly resolution 59/116 of 10 December 2004, the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee, at its forty-second session, reconvened the Working Group on Space Debris to consider, as necessary, the proposals of the Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee on space debris mitigation and related comments received. The Working Group held three meetings, on 28 February, 2 March and [...] March.
2. Claudio Portelli (Italy) was elected Chairman of the Working Group on Space Debris at the 628th meeting of the Subcommittee, on 28 February 2005.
3. The Working Group had before it the following documents for consideration:
 - (a) Note by the Secretariat on national research on space debris, safety of space objects with nuclear power sources on board and problems relating to their collision with space debris (A/AC.105/838 and Add.1);
 - (b) Consideration by the Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee of the comments received from member States of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space on the proposals on space debris mitigation and results of the consultative meeting of the Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee and the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space held in Vancouver, Canada on 4 October 2004 (A/AC.105/C.1/L.279).
4. The Working Group noted that member States had held informal consultations to elaborate proposals on principles for a space debris mitigation document to be developed by the Subcommittee and on a new multi-year work plan to be considered under the item on space debris.
5. The Working Group agreed to develop a document on space debris mitigation to be based on the following considerations:

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- (a) It would use the technical content of the Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee space debris mitigation guidelines (A/AC.105/C.1/L.260) as the basis;
- (b) It would not be more stringent than the Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee space debris mitigation guidelines;
- (c) It would not be legally binding under international law;
- (d) The implementation of space debris mitigation remains voluntary and should be carried out through national mechanisms;
- (e) It would recognize that exceptions might be justified;
- (f) It would be a living document that could be updated on a regular basis in accordance with evolving national and international practices on space debris mitigation and related research and technology developments;
- (g) It would be applicable to mission planning, to the operation of newly designed spacecraft and orbital stages and, if possible, to existing ones;
- (h) It would take into consideration the United Nations treaties and principles on outer space;
- (i) The space debris mitigation document is planned to be a concise document containing high-level qualitative guidelines and making reference to the Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee space debris mitigation guidelines. The document will have annexes as decided by the Working Group during its work plan.

6. The Working Group agreed that the Subcommittee would continue to consider the item on space debris in accordance with the following new multi-year work plan:

2005 Commence intersessional work, by the Working Group on Space Debris, in order to prepare for the start of the new work plan in 2006. The intersessional work would include consideration of the proposals from the member States of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space for the document to be developed covering space debris mitigation. Member States could also consider space debris issues concerning the use of nuclear power sources in space.

2006 Review the draft space debris mitigation document, arising from the intersessional activity of the Working Group on Space Debris and update it as necessary. Consider the process by which the document, when agreed, could be updated from time to time. Continue, as necessary, the dialogue with member States on the use of nuclear power sources in outer space.

Continue regular reporting by Member States and international organizations on their space debris research programmes. In addition, request that Member States and international organizations also continue, on a voluntary basis, to report to the Subcommittee on their space debris mitigation practices.

Re-establish the Working Group on Space Debris to consider the issues arising from the work plan and, in particular, the draft of the space debris mitigation document of the Subcommittee. The Working Group should also consider the work plan for later years and report as necessary on changes that may be considered appropriate. Continue with the intersessional work as required to expedite agreement on a space debris mitigation document.

2007 Aim to complete the Working Group on Space Debris tasks, for the submission of the document to the Subcommittee at its forty-fourth session, with a view to adopting the space debris mitigation document by the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space at its fiftieth session.

Continue regular reporting by Member States and international organizations on their space debris research programmes. In addition, request that Member States and international organizations also continue, on a voluntary basis, to report to the Subcommittee on their space debris mitigation practices.

Re-establish, as necessary, the Working Group on Space Debris to consider additional elements of the work plan.

7. The Working Group agreed that, to begin its intersessional work, the Working Group on Space Debris should hold an intersessional meeting during the forty-eighth session of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space.

8. At its 3rd meeting, on [...] March 2005, the Working Group adopted the present report.
