12 October 2010

General Assembly
GA/SPD/456

Department of Public Information • News and Media Division • New York

Sixty-fifth General Assembly
Fourth Committee
8th Meeting (AM)

CRISIS MANAGEMENT LANDSCAPE EVOLVING, FOURTH COMMITTEE HEARS AS IT PROBES DIVERSE

BENEFITS OF OUTER SPACE RESEARCH ON NATURAL DISASTER MITIGATION, DEVELOPMENT

Speakers Urge Free Access to Software for Space-Based Applications To Tackle Climate Change, Desertification, Biodiversity Loss, Disasters

Space-based technologies were increasingly important in a world where no region was spared the growing scope and threat of emergency situations and disasters, the Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) was told today, as it began its consideration of international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space.

Making introductory remarks in a panel discussion on “Space and Emergencies”, the Chairman of the Fourth Committee said that mitigating the devastating effects of disasters and emergencies was increasingly important. In that regard, space technology applications provided a tool set of increasing importance when it came to addressing challenges of major concern such as climate change, food security and health. The linkages between those issues and emergencies should be addressed in a holistic manner to find solutions.

The Assistant Secretary-General and Chief Information Technology Officer of the United Nations, Choi Soon-hong, said there was a huge stake in preventing, mitigating and recovering from manmade and natural disasters. The key was to save lives and protect human dignity, and provide information at the right time. When the devastating earthquake had struck Haiti earlier this year, apart from the tragic loss of life, the island’s nascent stage of economic development was halted, United Nations offices were destroyed, and many staff died.

Looking back, he hoped that in such a vital crisis, information could be shared seamlessly in order to respond more effectively. More lives could have been saved by improved preparedness. Over the past few years, a range of technologies for use in crisis situations had been deployed to lessen damage and save lives, such as the Mumbai massacre and the floods in Pakistan. The crisis management landscape was evolving, and there was increasing activism by non-governmental organizations and other actors.

Recognizing the need for credible, accurate, and timely information for managing crises, Mr. Choi said that the success of endeavours would have a huge impact for those on the ground.

Speaking on behalf of the European Union in the general debate that had preceded the panel, Belgium’s representative said that recent space issues had proven that the uses of outer space were multifaceted, and that it was best to adopt a flexible approach that drew on all relevant competencies and actors.

Australia’s representative said that his country, like the majority of nations, was reliant on

others for satellites and launch facilities, and on properly functioning international systems of cooperation. On a bilateral basis, Australia was also using a space-based operation in support of its neighbours in the Pacific, to examine tsunami risks.

He noted further that Sentinel Asia, established in 2005 after the tsunami, gathered information from satellites and provided an early warning system for disasters, through collaboration between space agencies and disaster agencies.

Speaking on behalf of Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), Brazil's delegate said that free access to open-source software for space-based applications should be guaranteed for all nations, since space technologies were vital for creating positive reform with regard to climate change, desertification, loss of biodiversity, the energy crisis, and artificial and natural disasters. South-South cooperation was also an important complement for promoting space capacities.

Stressing the importance of maintaining outer space for peaceful uses, Cuba's representative said that the international community must avoid using outer space as a playground for an arms race, as that would destroy the promising future of outer space and threaten society's very existence.

China had taken a big step forward in the global networking program and had achieved progress in laying the groundwork for remote-sensing satellites, that country's speaker said. That played an essential role in economic and social development. She maintained that all space activities should be undertaken for the well-being of mankind as a whole. Space exploration and its peaceful uses was a great endeavour, and the international community should work to build a harmonious outer space, in a more open and responsible manner.

Also speaking in the general debate were the representatives of Syria, Costa Rica, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and Ukraine.

The representatives of Chile, Australia and the Dominican Republic participated in a brief discussion following the panellists' statements.

The Fourth Committee Chairman made an introductory statement before the panel discussion.

The Fourth Committee will meet again at 10 a.m. on Wednesday, 13 October, to continue its general debate on international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space.

Background

As it began its consideration of international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space, the Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) was also expected to hold a panel discussion on "Space and emergencies", for which it had before it the report of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (document A/64/20).

The report summarized the outcome of its fifty-third session, held in Vienna from 9 to 18 June, during which the Committee discussed ways and means of maintaining outer space for peaceful purposes; implementation of the recommendations of the Third United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNISPACE III); spin-off benefits of space technology; space and society; space and water; space and climate change; use of space technology in the United Nations system; and international cooperation in promoting the use of space-derived geospatial data for sustainable development.

According to the report, the Committee also discussed the forty-seventh session of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee and the forty-ninth of the Legal Subcommittee. The Committee expressed satisfaction that the General Assembly had agreed on the Committee's continued consideration of ways to promote regional and interregional cooperation based on experiences stemming from the Space Conference of the Americas, the African Leadership

Conference on Space Science and Technology for Sustainable Development, and the role that space technology could play in the implementation of the recommendations of the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

The Committee, through its work in the scientific, technical and legal fields, had a fundamental role to play in ensuring that outer space was maintained for peaceful purposes, further stated the report. That role could be strengthened by new initiatives, as well as by continued progress in implementing the recommendations of UNISPACE III. The Committee noted the important role of space education in inspiring students to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, in strengthening national capabilities in science and industry and in enhancing educational opportunities through the use of distance-learning technologies such as tele-education and e-learning.

Some delegations, the report found, were of the view that the Committee provided a unique opportunity for fostering international and interregional dialogue and cooperation to maintain peaceful uses of outer space, and that it served as a valuable forum for encouraging research and information-sharing, exchanging good practices and defining confidence-building measures in the framework of international space law.

The Committee noted the project of the European Union to adopt a code of conduct for outer space activities. The draft text, which had been approved by the Council of the European Union in December 2008, included transparency and confidence-building measures and reflected a comprehensive approach to safety and security in outer space. The Committee also noted that consultations with space-faring countries were under way, with a view to reaching consensus on a text that would be acceptable to the greatest possible number of States. Additionally, the involvement of new space-faring nations in outer space activities and the expansion of outer space activities made it necessary to have universal adherence to the United Nations treaties on outer space in order to preserve, advance and guarantee the exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes.

The Scientific and Technical Subcommittee reported the results of its forty-seventh session, during which it considered the activities of the United Nations Programme on Space Applications.

Other areas it had addressed included: international space information services; regional and interregional cooperation; international satellite system for search and rescue; matters relating to remote sensing of the Earth by satellite; space debris; space-system-based disaster-management support; recent developments in global navigation satellite systems; use of nuclear power sources in outer space; issues relating to near-Earth objects; examination of the geostationary orbit; and International Space Weather Initiative; and long-term sustainability of outer space activities.

Turning to the Legal Subcommittee, the report said that it reviewed the status and application of the five United Nations treaties on outer space during its forty-eighth session. It also considered information on the activities of international intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations relating to space law; matters regarding the definition and delimitation of outer space and the character of the geostationary orbit; the possible revision of the Principles Relevant to the Use of Nuclear Power Sources in Outer Space; examination and review of the developments concerning the draft protocol on matters specific to space assets to the Convention on International Interests in Mobile Equipment; and capacity-building in space law, among other topics.

In other matters discussed in the report, the Committee agreed that spin-offs of space technology should be promoted, because they advanced economies through the production of new innovative technologies, and contributed to the quality of human life. It was further noted that space technologies were successfully utilized for the development of national communications infrastructures and other projects aimed at reaching sustainable development.

The Committee considered the agenda item entitled space and society and focused its discussions on education, and specifically, heard presentations related to bringing space education to Canadian classrooms, and building peace in young minds through space education. The Committee noted the information provided by States on their actions and programmes aimed at

attracting young people to the field of space by making them aware of the importance and significance of space science, technology and applications. The Committee noted the beneficial uses of space applications for society and their increasing use by developing countries as tools to achieve development goals in such areas as telemedicine, eradication of illicit crops and land planning. A large number of outreach activities and programmes for children and youth were being established. In addition, the Committee noted that the General Assembly had declared 2009 the International Year of Astronomy and several States used it to highlight the importance of space science and technology and to strengthen international cooperation in space education.

As regards the issue of space and water, many States were confounded by the broad spectrum of serious water-related issues — ranging from lack of water, and the resulting impact on populations and food production, to overabundance of water, causing floods and destruction — which constituted a significant threat to the sustainable development of human societies. Space-derived data were used extensively in water management and space technology and applications played an active role in addressing most water-related issues. The Committee noted that space technology and its applications had growing potential to provide useful information for scientific research on water-related issues and to support water management and policy- and decision-making, with a view to efficient and sustainable use of water resources.

The report recalled that space and climate change and noted that the adverse effects of climate change constituted a threat to all humanity and were manifested in a variety of phenomena, such as unusual weather, including droughts in some regions and floods in others; unusual dust storms in the Arabian region; glacial retreat in the Himalayas; and changes in the polar ice sheets. The Committee noted that, because of the global nature of climate change, global observations were required to monitor it more precisely, and that space-based observations, complemented with ground-based observations, were well suited to monitor the different manifestations of climate change and the factors contributing to it. The deployment of satellites carrying a variety of instruments to measure some essential climate variables and to monitor different processes related to climate change, such as emissions of greenhouse gases and aerosols, atmospheric dynamics, deforestation emissions and land degradation.

The Committee took up use of space technology in the United Nations system, and noted measures taken by an inter-agency meeting to further strengthen its role as a central mechanism of the United Nations for the coordination of space-related activities. In addition, the Committee noted that the seventh open informal session for States members and observers of the Committee, on the theme “space technology for emergency communications” that had been held immediately following the thirtieth session of the Inter-Agency Meeting, on 12 March. The Committee noted with satisfaction that the Secretariat continued to maintain a website on the coordination of outer space activities within the United Nations system (www.uncosa.unvienna.org).

Finally, the Committee concluded with its topic on the role of international cooperation in promoting the use of space-derived geospatial data for sustainable development. The Committee heard technical presentations under the following items: “OCEANSAT-2: meeting global demand”, by the representative of India; and “Geo-wiki.org: how community remote sensing can help to improve global land cover”, by the representative of Austria.

Panel Discussion

In his introduction, Committee Chairman Chitsaka Chipaziwa (Zimbabwe) said the panel discussion “Space and Emergencies” was a topic of major concern to all, especially as emergency situations and disasters continuously haunted societies. To mitigate their devastating effects, building capacities at all levels was increasingly important. There were linkages between emergencies and other challenges of major concern, such as climate change, and food security and health, and those needed to be addressed in a holistic manner and various tools for solutions needed to be explored. Space technology applications provided one such tool set of increasing importance in decision-making processes at all levels.

The panel discussion included introductory remarks from Choi Soon-hong, Assistant Secretary-General and Chief Information Technology Officer of the United Nations, who delivered a

presentation of the United Nations Crisis Information Management System; Mazlan Othman, Director of the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs(UNOOSA), who informed the Committee about the work under the United Nations Platform for Space-based Information for Disaster Management and Emergency Response (UN-SPIDER); and Ambassador Raimundo Gonzalez Aninat of Chile and Second Vice-Chair/Rapporteur of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space.

Mr. CHOI SOON-HONG mentioned his visit Haiti shortly before the earthquake earlier this year, during which he had spent time with peacekeepers, listened to their complaints and ideas, and debated change. It was agreed that the United Nations would be a launch pad for information and crisis capability. When the earthquake hit, the island's nascent stage of economic development was halted, the United Nations offices were destroyed, and many staff died. He hoped that vital crisis information would be shared seamlessly in future, in order to respond more effectively; he wished more lives had been saved by improved preparedness.

Over the past few years, a range of technologies had evolved for use in crisis situations, such as in the Mumbai massacre and the Pakistan floods, he noted. The crisis management landscape was evolving and there was increasing activism by non-governmental organizations and other actors. There was a huge stake in preventing, mitigating and recovering from manmade and natural disasters. The key was to save lives and protect human dignity, and provide information at the right time. He recognized the need for credible, accurate, and timely information for managing crises, and mentioned that the United Nations was working collaboratively with stakeholders. The success of endeavours would have a huge impact for those on the ground. He noted that more credible and timely information could also improve public information and the work of journalists. In addition, fundraising could be launched more effectively.

Additionally, with more accurate information, addressing post-conflict situations could be better organized. Crisis management included wide-ranging information. Technology would not solve that problem alone; what were needed was political will, leadership, cooperation, and a spirit of community.

Ms. OTHMAN, Director of UNOOSA, informed the Committee about the work under the UN-SPIDER. She noted that the Office had been set up in 1962 to service the community with respect to the peaceful uses of outer space. It was now headquartered in Vienna with 32 staff members, two sections and one programme. There were also regional offices, in Beijing, Bonn and Vienna. The Office discharged the responsibilities of the Secretary-General under the United Nations treaties and principles on outer space and promoted the application of space law. With regard to space and emergencies, whether a flood, an earthquake, landslide or tsunami, information on impacts were key to providing a rapid response. For example, satellites could determine the extent of floods and allow for emergency responders. Today, satellites could look below the clouds, she added.

Mr. RAIMUNDO GONZALEZ ANINAT (Chile) noted that regional cooperation was a vehicle for dealing with a world that faced global issues, such as climate change. However, space applications played a clear function in emergencies by, among other things, addressing humanitarian catastrophes. International cooperation and human security were indispensable to mitigate natural disasters. Globalization and interconnectedness should lead to a strengthened approach to natural disasters. The world was constantly in a state of crisis, and thus, there was a need for technological awareness to deal with it. The use of outer space should be based on international cooperation, and that had to be understood as a relationship between States, and thus, in a diplomatic context.

He added that all countries should be able to access space technology, and thus, a strategy of cooperation was crucial in light of the emergence of the many applications of space technology that went beyond borders. Unfortunately, technology was not up to the task of preventing international disasters today; however, international cooperation had come into its own when monitoring the environment and in disasters, and there should be a common commitment to prevent them. He noted the need for inter-regional cooperation, and drew attention to the centre in Costa Rica, which began institutionalizing space cooperation and providing early information on disasters. Through its space conferences, Latin America was a pertinent concrete example of how to deal with

the subject at hand.

In the ensuing discussion, the representative of Australia mentioned the Sentinel Asia early warning system, established in 2005 after the tsunami. Countries in the region had been brought together, and space agencies as well as disaster agencies were now functioning and getting information from satellites, using and sharing information. He noted the monitoring of 10 situations in the region, such as the volcano in Indonesia and the flooding in Pakistan. Small island developing States suffered so much and were at risk, especially when it came to the pressing issue of climate change. There was the need to get systems in place as quickly as possible.

The delegate of the Dominican Republic said he was grateful for help from the international community to build capacities to deal with natural disasters. He noted the arrival in January of a technical advisory mission from the UN-SPIDER programme. His country shared the same island as Haiti, and had learned from the experience of having responded. Loss of human life and damage to human property must be prevented, before disasters of that kind happened. In addition, he appreciated the mandatory nature of cooperation in all areas; it was important to bear that in mind given the challenges of nature.

Mr. CHOI said that deforestation was significant, and when the hurricanes came, water would threaten the towns and cities, and in those cases, space technology could look at patterns, amount of rainfall, and what would happen when the disaster struck. He noted the possibility of not building towns where there was a probability for ground flooding as a result of heavy rainfall. There were many ways to use space technology to do more to prevent and manage crisis.

Ms. OTHMAN said there were many ways to strengthen the relationship between Member States and UN-SPIDER, and mentioned that States could nominate national focal points, and she noted that her office had sent letters requesting this.

Mr. ANINAT noted the support his country got after the recent earthquake in Chile, especially immediately from the UN-SPIDER office, and the United Nations Space Affairs Office. He noted that the Dominican Republic had been in Coalition on Public Understanding of Science (COPUS) for several years; he noted meetings on the topic in the Latin American and Caribbean region, and said that some did not come because they did not have the money to come although the United Nations mandated they come. What needed to happen was a reaffirmation by the General Assembly to attend to participate in the meetings.

THOMAS LAMBERT (Belgium), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that body remained strongly and actively committed to guaranteeing the peaceful uses of outer space for all nations and for coming generations. The international cooperation on the peaceful uses of outer space was a substantive chapter of the European Space Policy to be implemented by the European Commission through the setting up of a European space programme. That new constitutional framework aimed to achieve a more effective coordination of the actions of the European Union and its member States.

He said that recent space issues had proven that the uses of outer space were multifaceted, and that it was best to adopt a flexible approach that drew on all relevant competencies and actors. The solution to problems such as space debris, radio interference, and the protection of space systems were key to ensuring a peaceful, sound, sustainable and equitable sharing of space resources.

An important part of the discussion held within the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNCOPUOS) and other forums concerned the use of space systems for socio-economic applications, he said. From security to natural resources management, satellites were assuming a growing importance in everyday life. Topics such as space and climate change, space and water, and space and society proved the continuous need to reflect on the better use of outer space and of space systems and capacities, notably by educating and involving the users of those applications.

He further said that strengthening the link between the space services providers and the

users' community was another big challenge to which the European space policy was oriented. Towards meeting that challenge, Belgium and the European Union had organized a high-level conference entitled "Space for the African Citizen", held in Brussels in September. The outcome of that event would be presented in the discussion at the Africa-European Union Summit, to be held in Libya at the end of the year.

CAMILO LICKS ROSTAND PRATES (Brazil), speaking on behalf of Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), said that free access to open-source software for space-based applications should be guaranteed for all nations. South-South cooperation was also an important complement for promoting space capacities. His delegation valued the dialogue which arose from the Space Conference of the Americas. Such cooperation fortified national and regional capacities, and supported scientific and technological education to assist developing countries.

He said that space technologies were also vital for assisting the implementation of the recommendations of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, and could used as a tool for creating positive change with regard to climate change, desertification, loss of biodiversity, the energy crisis, and artificial and natural disasters. The UN-SPIDER had become an important world network for preventing damage from disasters. That should be multiplied through greater cooperation and should enable countries to secure information from space. UN-SPIDER should also consolidate its work and increase its efficiency and cost effectiveness.

DAVID WINDSOR (Australia) said that space had increasingly become an integral part of everyday life. Benefits derived from space applications had transformed the way people looked at their environment and planet, ways of communicating and interacting, and how people move from one place to another, dramatically increasing safety, security, accuracy, predictability and convenience in daily life.

He said that Australia, like the majority of countries, was reliant on others for satellites and launch facilities, and on properly functioning international systems of cooperation. His country was in the process of developing a national space policy, which would lay out a vision underpinned by the notion that international collaboration was vital to Australia's space efforts. The country was, and would continue to be, reliant on the space systems of its international friends and partners, and had formal links with the United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), Russia's Federal Space Agency, and the European Space Agency.

On a bilateral basis, Australia was also using a space-based operation in support of its neighbours in the Pacific, he said. As part of an African Union-Australia-sponsored project to examine tsunami risk in the south-west Pacific, Geoscience Australia used high-resolution multi-spectral data from the "Quickbird" satellite to produce detailed bathymetric maps for the shallow-water coastal areas of Tonga and the Solomon Islands, as part of a comprehensive tsunami risk assessment of those island nations.

Climate change and human activities accelerated hazards, such as deforestation, landslides, droughts, and floods in Asia-Pacific countries, he said. To mitigate those hazards, environmental monitoring had become more important. Space Application for Environment (SAFE), a voluntary-based initiative in the Asia-Pacific region, aimed to encourage environmental monitoring for climate change mitigation and adaptation studies, as well as other forms of practical application.

IHAB HAMED (Syria) said that the Outer Space Committee had a role to play in technical, scientific and legal applications. It should also continue its efforts to stop nuclear proliferation and militarization of outer space. Every country should have access to outer space, regardless of their socioeconomic status. He noted the use of global monitoring systems in sustainable development, highlighting their application in drought-ridden villages as a way of pointing to where to search for water.

Noting too that outer space could be used to implement the Millennium Development Goals, he urged the Committee to focus on poverty reduction, sustainable development and energy, water, biodiversity, climate change, and food security. Syria was concerned with the recent natural disasters and the resulting deaths of hundreds of thousands of people, which cost tens of billions of

dollars. Focus was needed on the creation of a global system of disaster management through the use of a spatial system. He reiterated that developed countries must ensure that developing countries had access to outer space at a reasonable price.

REBECA HERNÁNDEZ TOLEDANO (Cuba) noted that there were 22,600 nuclear weapons in the world, and over 7,500 were ready to be deployed immediately. In addition, military expenditures continued to increase. The current applicable legal framework to deal with that reality was insufficient. She reiterated the vital need to avoid outer space as a "playground for the arms race", which would destroy the promising future of outer space and threaten humankind's existence. The Outer Space Committee should play a role in development. Despite her country's constrained resources, it still had further developed its space applications. She noted the use of space technology in predicting the weather, which helped to reduce lives lost during meteorological events in the country.

She said that the right of all States to use outer space for the whole of humanity was universally accepted. Achieving full autonomy in all States was inviolable; that was why States increased their space activities. For that purpose, there needed to be more bilateral, regional and international cooperation, especially through technology exchange.

SAUL WEISLEDER (Costa Rica) recognized the common interest to use outer space for peaceful purposes, and advocated for international cooperation to be strengthened to improve living conditions for the whole of humanity. His country was interested in technological research, creation of technical capacity, space legislation, and the prevention of natural disasters. He expressed concern regarding pollution in outer space and noted that debris was accumulating. That threatened space exploration, for which he sought legally binding standards. Regulatory issues were the duty of States, regardless of their level of development. In addition, there was a need for free and fair access of all States to the geostationary satellite orbit, which, with its finite capacity for communication satellites operating in the available frequency spectrum, was at risk of saturation. The principal responsibility was to promote the progressive development of international law as it related to the outer space environment.

YUYA YANG (China) said China had taken a big step forward in the global networking program and had achieved progress in laying the groundwork for remote-sensing satellites. That played an essential role in economic and social development. She maintained that all space activities should be undertaken for the well-being of mankind as a whole. Current research and projects in space technologies marked the start of a new stage in the cooperation of the Chinese Government and the United Nations Outer Space Committee, and would promote international cooperation and capacity-building. Next year, 2011, marked the golden jubilee of both that Committee and the first manned space flight. China would continue to support the Outer Space Committee in its work with the international community for the peaceful uses of outer space, and welcomed the fact that UNOOSA would hold a themed exhibition in marking the anniversary of the first manned space flight.

She said that space exploration and its peaceful uses was a great endeavour of mankind, and the international community should work to build a harmonious outer space, in a more open and responsible manner.

KIM YONG JO (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that the twenty-first century was an era of space science. The peaceful use of outer space was closely related to the well-being of mankind. Today, after more than half a century since the first satellite was launched in 1957, the number of satellite-capable States had increased, and many countries, including developing ones, participated in peaceful outer space development activities, thus contributing to the common prosperity and sustainable development of mankind. His country was one of the satellite-manufacturing and launching States, and had successfully launched and placed its first satellite in orbit in 1998, and later, in 2009.

He said that his country's outer space activities were in full exercise of its sovereign rights, and were peaceful. However, the launch of the satellite of his country had been condemned as a so-called "ballistic missile launch" and had been brought to the Security Council last year, leading to

coercive sanctions against his country. Over the years, the acts which would lead to destructive impacts of the peaceful use of outer space increased and gave rise to international concern. The typical example was the missile defence system being developed by the United States, the true aim of which was "to realize a dream of the world hegemony by holding down its strategic rivalries". More than ever, the international concern over the risky missile defence shield was growing. The resolution calling for transparency and confidence-building in outer space activities, therefore, continued to be adopted at the General Assembly. Member States should implement the General Assembly resolutions calling for the prevention of military use of outer space.

ANDRIY KHARYTYNSKYI (Ukraine) said that regional and interregional cooperation was instrumental in the peaceful uses of space activities and in the achieving of the Millennium Development Goals. Issues like water management and disaster mitigation could be greatly helped through space-based observation technologies. Such technologies were also a powerful engine for growth in industrial and service sectors, and could be applied to achieving greater human development.

He believed that the Committee should continue its work in that connection, and noted that limited financial resources hampered the efforts of UNOOSA. Thus, he appealed to Member States to continue supporting that office, along with the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. He said that peace in outer space should be maintained, and international space law was necessary to maintain it.

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