

FACT SHEET

OUTER SPACE AND DISARMAMENT

Efforts in the United Nations to maintain outer space as a realm free of conflict and open for the benefit to all States began in 1957, months prior to the launch of the first artificial satellite into Earth orbit. Early proposals for prohibiting the use of space for military purposes and the placement of weapons of mass destruction in outer space were considered in the late 1950s and early 1960s by the United Nations.



The existing legal framework

The Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies (“Outer Space Treaty”) entered into force in 1967, after consideration by the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and the General Assembly. The Treaty provides the basic framework for international space law. In particular, it prohibits the placement of nuclear weapons or any other kinds of weapons of mass destruction in outer space and the stationing of such weapons on celestial bodies. It also prohibits the establishment of military bases, the testing of any type of weapons and the conduct of military manoeuvres on celestial bodies. Moreover, it establishes basic principles related to the peaceful use of outer space. This includes that the exploration and use of outer space shall be carried out for the benefit and in the interests of all countries and that the moon and other celestial bodies shall not be subject to national appropriation or claims of sovereignty.

“Security, including in the realm of outer space, is best guaranteed through cooperation and the rule of law, backed by effective and practical measures for verification and enforcement”

Angela Kane, former High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Statement to the GGE on Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures in Outer Space Activities, July 2012

“Outer space has increasingly become congested, contested and competitive. This has led to growing concern that an accident or miscalculation could escalate into conflict. We must find a way to manage these new challenges.

I welcome all efforts to build new norms, including advancing transparency and confidence-building measures, or TCBMs, proposals for a code of conduct on outer space activities and on a legally-binding instrument to prevent an arms race in outer space.”

Mr. KIM Won-soo, Acting High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Seoul, Republic of Korea, 7 December 2015

Current efforts

Since the early 1980s, the Conference on Disarmament (CD) has considered further proposals under the agenda item “prevention of an arms race in outer space”, including draft treaties aimed at, *inter alia*, preventing the placement of weapons in outer space and prohibiting the use of anti-satellite weapons. In June 2014, the CD issued document CD/1985 containing an updated version of the 2006 draft Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space, the Threat or Use of Force against Outer Space Objects introduced by China and Russia.

Building upon renewed political interest in advancing cooperative

approaches to questions of outer space security, by resolution 65/68 the General Assembly established a GGE on transparency and confidence-building measures (TCBMs) in outer space activities. The Group adopted, by consensus, a study containing a set of voluntary TCBMs (A/68/189*).

Subsequently, Member States have taken steps to implement the TCBMs, including the consideration of political commitments to encourage responsible action in outer space activities. Such commitments include a proposed international code of conduct for outer space activities and unilateral pledges to not be the first to place weapons in outer space. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 69/38, on 22 October 2015 First and Fourth Committees convened a joint ad hoc meeting on possible challenges to space security and sustainability in which Member States held a substantive exchange of opinions on various aspects of security in outer space.

Member States have continued to explore means of implementing TCBMs, including through the Disarmament Commission as well as in the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, which is developing guidelines on the long-term sustainability of outer space.

The role of the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs

As the General Assembly has endorsed enhanced coordination between United Nations entities involved in outer space activities on matters related to TCBMs, the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs continues to support Member States in their implementation of the TCBMs cooperating closely with other parts of the United Nations system to this end. The Office for Disarmament Affairs has established strong cooperation with the Office for Outer Space Affairs in this regard.

Outer Space Facts

- The number of States parties to the five United Nations treaties governing the peaceful use of outer space are as follows:

Outer Space Treaty: 105

Rescue Agreement: 95

Liability Convention: 94

Registration Convention: 63

Moon Agreement: 17

- More than 60 States and inter-governmental organizations presently operate, either independently or jointly, satellites or other assets in outer space.
- Thirteen States and inter-governmental organizations have independently launched objects into outer space.
- Three States are known to have tested anti-satellite weapons.