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COMMITTEE ON THE PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE

meeting as Preparatory Committee for the Second United Nations Conference
on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space

VERBATIM RECORD OF THE TWO HUNDRED AND NINTH MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 25 June 1980, at 3.55 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. JANKOWITSCH (Austria)

Preparatory work of the Second United Nations Conference on the Exploration and
Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (continued)

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* A/CONF.101/PC/PV.2.

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The meeting was called to order at 3.55 p.m.

PREPARATORY WORK OF THE SECOND UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE EXPLORATION AND
PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE (continued)

Mr. VAN KESTEREN (Netherlands): I should like to make some observations on the questions before us in our capacity as Preparatory Committee for the Second United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space -- UNISPACE 82. Before doing so, however, I should like to express my delegation's satisfaction on the preparatory work done so far. We extend our appreciation to the Secretariat for what it has already accomplished. The documents before us are testimony of the imaginative spirit in which preparations are being carried out. Some elements in those documents, such as the space demonstrations mentioned in document A/CONF.101/PC/L.1/Add.1, can even be called exciting. These activities will not fail to attract public attention all over the world to what the use of space technology can mean.

As becomes clear from its agenda the Conference should put emphasis on existing and potential uses of space technology for the benefit of the developing countries. That implies that attention should also be given to questions which are directly related to space activities but are not space activities in the proper sense of the word, such as training, infrastructural preconditions for an optimal utilization of space technology, financial implications and the like.

Nobody among us will deny this, but we nevertheless have the impression that we might run the risk that, almost automatically, all attention will go to the most advanced, and thereby most sensational, aspects of outer space activities, resulting in a limitation of the value of the Conference for developing countries. We feel that we should be aware of this risk.

As an example of the way the interests of less advanced countries should be taken into account in the organization of the Conference, I wish to mention the possibility of exhibitions. In our opinion, we should not be limited to a show of the most sophisticated successes of outer space technology. Less advanced countries should have the opportunity to show, if necessary by simple means, such as a stand with photographs and booklets, not only their achievements but also the problems they face.

(Mr. van Kesteren, Netherlands)

Simple methods like that could trigger discussions and contacts between all participants in the Conference, including fruitful exchanges of information on their experiences among participants from developing countries. In other words, what should be avoided, in our view, is a one-way traffic of information going from the spacefaring nations to the other States, the latter forced into the role of onlookers or, at best, students. What we need is not an exhaustive review of all developments but a real exchange of information on all efforts and in all directions. The form of the Conference should be adapted to that objective.

I should like to add that information about the role that the application of space technology could play in the development process is not of importance only to the developing countries themselves. In the Netherlands, for example, there is certainly a lack of information in this regard, which has its consequences for the Netherlands development co-operation policy. My personal experience is that it is always extremely difficult to explain to government officials who are responsible for development co-operation activities that space-related activities, such as the use of remote sensing data, could be of importance to the development process. The Conference could help to make those people more aware too.

I do not want to say that promotion of awareness will automatically lead to more emphasis being placed on space applications in the development co-operation policies; but what is important is that more information on these questions will at least lead to a more objective consideration of all the possibilities of accelerating economic development, including the use of space technology.

Another factor that could lead to there being a certain preponderance of the views of industrialized countries at the Conference is the proportion of the final document drawn from national papers. We all know that, sometimes, the majority of answers to questionnaires on space issues sent to Member States come from developed countries. We hope that the secretariat of the Conference will find ways and means of avoiding a similar disequilibrium with regard to the national papers prepared for the Conference.

With regard to the background papers, we are in agreement with what is contained in documents A/CONF.101/PC/L.6 and A/CONF.101/PC/L.6/Add.1. The background paper on "Training and education of users of space technology"

(Mr. van Kesteren, Netherlands)

will be drafted in part by the International Institute for Aerial Survey and Earth Sciences (ITC) at Enschede, Netherlands. I am pleased to announce that the Netherlands Government has decided to support the Institute in this work with a grant of slightly more than 185,000 Dutch guilders -- about \$95,000. This money will be used mainly for travel and per diem expenses of the international team of experts referred to in document A/CONF.101/PC/L.6.

With regard to the question of the venue of the Conference, my delegation has always been of the view that, for a number of practical reasons, it should be held preferably in one of the established United Nations cities. We are glad, therefore, that yesterday the Austrian delegation extended an invitation to hold the Conference in Vienna.

As far as the duration of the Conference is concerned, we feel that, in view of the comprehensive preparations for the Conference, a two-week period is sufficient. However, we should, in our view, avoid a too rigid attitude on this point.

An inter-ministerial Committee has been set up in the Netherlands to draft our national paper. I expect that the central item in that paper will be the usual problems connected with the application of remote sensing data. Although there was initially some hesitation in the Netherlands with regard to a second United Nations space conference, enthusiasm is now increasing more and more. We trust that that Conference will be a great success.

The CHAIRMAN: I now call on the representative of the World Meteorological Organization.

Mr. RASMUSSEN (World Meteorological Organization): In May this year the Executive Committee of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) reviewed with great interest the plans for the preparation of background papers for the Second United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. WMO will contribute to the preparation of these papers, listed in document A/CONF.101/PC/L.6, as suggested by the Secretariat of the United Nations.

(Mr. Rasmussen, WMO)

Specific sections of the papers entitled "Compatibility and complementarity of satellite systems", "Training and education of users of space technology" and "Role of the United Nations system in space activities" will be prepared by WMO. Some of these activities include training programmes in space technology which the WMO undertakes jointly with other agencies, as was mentioned by the representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) on Tuesday morning.

In addition, WMO would like to review and comment on the draft papers prepared by the International Astronautical Federation (IAF) and the Committee on Space Research (COSPAR) concerning the relevance of space activities to earth resource management and to the environment and the paper entitled "Efficient use of the geostationary orbit".

The Executive Committee felt that the growing importance of the application of space technology to meteorology, climatology and operational hydrology deserves a further contribution by WMO to the Conference. Satellites and their supporting ground systems are becoming more and more fully integrated into the operational weather services of the developing as well as the developed countries. Within the framework of the World Weather Watch (WWW), these space activities involve a wide range of internationally co-operative operational - that is, day-by-day operational - activities, including satellite imagery, which monitors the coverage and movement of clouds in weather systems, the determination of wind fields from cloud motions, the global observation of sea surface temperature and the global observation of the vertical temperature structure of the atmosphere. In addition, data are exchanged internationally using the global telecommunications system operated by the national weather services of States members of WMO.

Space-based systems, moreover, are becoming increasingly important in the acquisition of meteorological data from remote sensing systems, such as the drifting buoys deployed in the southern ocean and other remote and difficult environments.

In order coherently to present this wide-ranging programme of utilization of space technology in meteorology and related disciplines, the Executive Committee decided that WMO might prepare two additional papers which it felt would be a significant contribution to the Conference. One might be a booklet entitled

(Mr. Rasmussen, WMO)

something like "Satellites in meteorology, oceanography and hydrology" giving a broad overview and aimed at a non-technical audience and clearly showing how satellites and satellite data are being used in the geophysical sciences and services and providing information with regard to what is planned for the future in this regard. The other, a document entitled "Satellite systems in support of WMO programmes and joint programmes with other international organizations", might be prepared. That paper would describe the operational and planned satellite systems that contribute to the programmes of the WMO, notably the World Weather Watch (WWW), where emphasis would be placed upon the technical nature of the systems, including material on satellite sensors and systems for data processing exchange and utilization. The document would be intended to be technically factual and authoritative.

These papers would be prepared in consultation with a WMO panel of experts on satellites which includes significant representation from the developing countries. . WMO would be grateful if the Preparatory Committee would consider these papers for inclusion in the list of background papers being prepared for the Conference.

Mr. KNUTH (German Democratic Republic): There is no doubt that UNISPACE 82 must be at the centre of our work. We all know that the Outer Space Committee has at the same time been charged with the function of the Preparatory Committee for the Second United Nations Conference on Outer Space. I should like, therefore, to outline my delegation's position on some aspects of that Conference.

The German Democratic Republic attaches great importance, and will make an active contribution, to the Second United Nations Conference on Outer Space. My delegation holds that the provisional agenda of the Conference, which was adopted at the thirty-fourth session of the General Assembly, pursuant to the proposal submitted at last year's session of the Outer Space Committee, offers good opportunities for an intensive exchange of views on the scientific and technical experience that has been acquired in the peaceful uses of outer space and on methods and results of space research.

My delegation would like to take this opportunity to draw attention to the importance of the background papers that are to be prepared. We appreciate that, according to the information presented by the Outer Space Affairs Division, these papers will be elaborated with the assistance of international groups of authors and scientific bodies. That is to ensure that they reflect up-to-date knowledge in their specific fields; at the same time, it will be helpful in the compilation of the national papers, which, in particular, should deal with the specific problems of Member States, propose possible scientific and technical solutions and indicate the needs and feasibility regarding international co-operation on peaceful uses of outer space.

My delegation is pleased to note that work on the preparation of the final document of the Conference is starting well in advance. My delegation further assumes that, in accordance with the procedure at international meetings, modifications which may be submitted at the Conference will be included in the final document upon general approval.

(Mr. Knuth, German Democratic Republic)

In view of the difficult organizational, technical and scientific problems the Conference will have to deal with, my delegation believes that the composition of the secretariat responsible for the preparatory work of the Conference and the secretariat of the Conference itself should be in accordance with general United Nations practice and that competent staff with the relevant technical background should be recruited. The United Nations Secretariat should make all the assistance required available to the Conference secretariat.

After those general remarks, I should like now to deal with one issue in a more concrete manner. My delegation has taken note with great interest of documents A/CONF.101/PC/L.1 and Add.1 and 2, which are related to the topic, promotion of public awareness. We are convinced that the Outer Space Affairs Division has prepared all the suggestions outlined in those documents with a great deal of care and initiative in order to carry out the mandate given to it by the Advisory Committee. But, after taking a thorough look at all those proposals, we must confess that we have some reservations. If we take into account the estimated total costs for all those proposals amounting to about \$300,000 from the United Nations budget - which, owing to the inflationary movement of prices and to some unforeseen additional costs, would probably be more than that - then we consider some of the proposed activities at least inadequate.

As our delegation also needs some clarifications concerning the real content of some measures, we should like now to express our point of view with regard to some of the proposals in document A/CONF.101/PC/L.1 and Add.1. The following points - "A. Special United Nations stamp; D. Exhibition space for Member States; G. Updating of the United Nations publication 'Space Activities and Resources'" - seem reasonable to us and may be realized at low or moderate cost. Also, the proposed "Poster contest" could be useful; the only question that is still unanswered is how to make an objective judgement of the designs submitted, and how to fix adequate prizes for the winners of this contest.

But we have great difficulty in seeing the real content of the proposed "Essay contest" for students between the ages of 12 and 16 on the subject of the next 25 years of space research and exploration. Even very experienced

(Mr. Knuth, German Democratic Republic)

scientists would deal with such a question with the utmost caution. Let us simply imagine the reality of such a prognosis about the state of science and technology in the year 1980 written 25 years ago - that is, in 1955. The optimistic extreme of these essays might well be the colonization of the moon and Mars by men. On the other hand, the pessimistic extreme might be, for example, a drastic cutting back of all space activities imposed by a global energy crisis and the need to spend the available money on more urgent tasks. Upon which criteria could a jury select winners from the almost unlimited number of possibilities between these extremes?

UNISPACE 82 must be a Conference at which the status and the real potential benefits of space research and space technology are to be discussed in a scientific and realistic manner. But, in our opinion, this proposed essay contest might replace science by science fiction, and we should try to avoid such a picture of our Conference under any circumstances.

Concerning the proposed "Pre-Conference booklet" and, to a minor degree, the "Newsletter", we simply have difficulty in identifying the intended real meaning of these publications. Unfortunately, there are no clear hints either in the pertinent paragraphs of document A/CONF.101/PC/L.1/Add.1 explaining this content in more detail. The anticipated number of copies is too small for widespread public information but too large for simply keeping the participating States Members of the United Nations regularly informed. Would it not be more economical and would it not suffice, during the preparatory phase of the Conference for the Secretary-General of the Conference (who is still to be appointed) to keep all the Permanent Missions of Member States in New York regularly informed of all important questions and developments by means of normal United Nations documents? That information could then be instantly transmitted to the respective national preparatory committees for UNISPACE 82 and taken into account by them.

(Mr. Knuth, German Democratic Republic)

In our opinion, this procedure would be quite sufficient to ensure that all the necessary work at the national level was carried out in time.

Taking into account the high estimated costs to be borne by the United Nations budget, we have strong reservations about the world-wide special United Nations radio programmes outlined in document A/CONF.101/PC/L.1/Add.2. We feel it would be more suitable, cost-saving and absolutely sufficient if the Secretary-General of the Conference would regularly hold press briefings for all journalists accredited to the United Nations. On these occasions, one of his deputies could perhaps inform the audience about the scientific and technical content of the different topics on the Conference agenda, based, for example, on the relevant background papers. In this case, one would be absolutely independent of the unknown and, perhaps, questionable number of listeners to the proposed special United Nations radio broadcasts. This could well be replaced by world-wide and well-directed information programmes disseminated by the mass media of all Member States. Simultaneously, the role of the United Nations journalists would be increased, their own interest in the problems of space research and UNISPACE 82 would be developed, and the United Nations, while probably being more successful in promoting public awareness, would not have to bear additional costs, and its Outer Space Division could be spared time-wasting work.

Permit me now to make some remarks on the Conference activities outlined in chapter II of document A/CONF.101/PC/L.1/Add.1.

We also consider some of these activities necessary, but we feel that the content and schedule of such secondary programmes should be carefully selected and restricted in a reasonable manner. Otherwise, we feel there is a danger many representatives having their attention diverted from the proper task of the second United Nations Space Conference, with the result that the necessary discussions of the national papers, with their problems and suggestions, might suffer. The expected time limit of two weeks for plenary sessions, oral presentation and discussion of many national papers, and the probably very time-consuming discussion of the final report, with its important conclusions, demands constructive and active work on the part of all delegations, without too much disturbance from outside.

(Mr. Knuth, German Democratic Republic)

We therefore deem it advisable for the secretariat to ensure, in its future preparatory work for the Conference, a proper balance between the main task of conference work and the possible secondary programmes.

Mr. VERESTCHETIN (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) (interpretation from Russian): Let me make some preliminary remarks concerning the forthcoming United Nations Conference on Outer Space.

First of all, I wish to say on behalf of my delegation that much importance is attached, in the Soviet Union, to the forthcoming United Nations Conference on Outer Space, and my delegation is prepared to participate actively in the discussion of all matters related to its preparation.

We note with satisfaction that the Secretariat has done some serious and valuable work in preparing a set of documents which will be very helpful to the discussion of these matters, both during the meetings of this informal working group and in the course of the meetings of the Outer Space Committee itself. In particular, we consider particularly satisfactory document A/CONF.101/PC/L.2, which contains the agenda and an enumeration of the subjects to be discussed at this session of the Committee.

Now, with regard to the duration of the Conference, we are prepared to discuss any proposal, but, as has already been pointed out at this session, we feel that two weeks is sufficient for that Conference, especially if we take into account the duration of similar conferences held by the United Nations in the past.

As far as the documents are concerned, we shall eventually have some definite and specific observations to make with regard to the list before us. But we are pleased to see that the principle which we have upheld - of preparing these documents on an international basis by employing specialists and scientists from different countries - is actually being implemented by the international organizations that have been active in the preparation of these documents. We are also prepared to take a constructive part in the discussion of the questions of venue, the participants and the different officers, and of all other matters involved in the preparation of UNISPACE 82.

(Mr. Verestchetin, USSR)

I wanted to inform the Committee of the fact that in the Soviet Union preparations for that Conference have already begun. Several organizations are taking part, and a number of Soviet administrations also are participating in that work. It is our intention, as well, to involve in that preparatory work several very well known scientists, experts and specialists so that they can share their experience, and we hope that we shall also be learning something from the other participants in the Conference, because even though we share the general view that, first and foremost, the Conference must serve the needs of the developing countries, nonetheless we also realize that as a United Nations Conference it will be serving the interests of all Members; therefore, we certainly cannot say that some participants will be teaching and that others will simply be learning. We believe that, from both the organizational and the scientific points of view, the benefits to be derived from the Conference should be available to all, not only to the States actually participating in space exploration.

At this stage I wish to offer some preliminary comments on the question of preparation of the work of the Conference and the information to be provided on the Conference, and also on the Conference itself. I am referring to Secretariat document A/CONF.101/PC/L.1/ and Add.1 and Add.2.

(Mr. Verestchetin, USSR)

From those documents we see that the Secretariat has done some very important work in this field and we must be very grateful to their authors because the preparation of such a comprehensive listing has certainly required a good deal of time and effort. None the less, some of the proposed measures would require thorough discussion during the meetings of the working group and of the Committee itself before we could take a position in favour of their adoption.

With reference to the document contained in A/CONF.101/PC/L.1/Add.2, reference is made to the organization of radio broadcasts in different languages, which, as the document shows, would require the spending of approximately \$300,000 for such broadcasts to be transmitted throughout the world. It appears to my delegation that the main purpose of this activity is not very clear because if it is the task of the Committee to engage in disseminating propaganda in favour of the Conference, that should hardly be done through such broadcasts directed at the populations of the various countries. That is a task which should rather be undertaken by Member States themselves, if they feel that the Conference is important and interesting enough. That is why we propose that this idea should be discussed in detail. We should also like to hear from the authors of the documents whether there are any precedents for such activities and whether it is really necessary to spend such a large sum on broadcasts.

The second measure we should like to note is mentioned in document A/CONF.101/PC/L.1/Add.1 where reference is made of a pre-conference booklet to be produced in five languages at a cost of about \$33,000. At the same time the document contains the information that in addition to the \$50,000 already appropriated for information activities under the budget of the Conference, the further amount of \$33,000 should be added for the booklet. I think that some thought should be given to whether the pre-conference booklet should be issued since there will also be a newsletter, three issues of which will appear in 1981 and two in 1982. Moreover, other significant documents will be circulated within the participating countries. We therefore wonder what is the purpose of this booklet, who is going to write it and what its content is going to be - all of which raises doubts in our minds about the need for such a booklet.

(Mr. Verestchetin, USSR)

The third item we wanted to mention is not even a critical comment but perhaps a question that we wanted to put to the authors of these documents, namely: whether it is appropriate, as proposed therein, to organize two exhibitions. It is proposed to hold one from September 1981 to September 1982 in the lobby of the Headquarters building in New York, and the second during the Conference itself, at the actual Conference site. Here, too, perhaps thought should be given to whether the recommendation is appropriate.

In general, I should like to assure the Committee and the representatives present here that the Soviet Union attaches serious significance to the Conference and that we shall do everything possible to make use of all available opportunities to share our experience with other countries and, in turn, to learn from others - both during the preparatory period and during the actual session of this important Conference, which will be the second conference in the history of the exploration of outer space.

The meeting rose at 4.35 p.m.