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Chairman: Mr. GONZALEZ (Chile)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.45 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 72: INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION IN THE PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE

- (a) REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE (A/41/20 and Corr.1)
- (b) IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SECOND UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE EXPLORATION AND PEACE USES OF OUTER SPACE: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL (A/41/560 and Corr.1)

AGENDA ITEM 137: QUESTION OF THE REVIEW OF THE CONVENTION ON REGISTRATION OF OBJECTS LAUNCHED INTO OUTER SPACE

1. The CHAIRMAN drew the attention of the members of the Committee to the report of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) (A/41/20 and Corr.1) and the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the recommendations of the Second United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (A/41/560 and Corr.1). In connection with agenda item 137, there was a note by the Secretary-General contained in document A/41/141.
2. COPUOS was a focal point for international co-operation in the peaceful uses of outer space and played a major role in assisting the General Assembly in its efforts to ensure the orderly progress of outer space activities and spread the benefits from that advanced technology to all mankind. Having successfully finalized five basic international conventions relating to outer space, COPUOS had adopted in 1986 the draft principles relating to remote sensing of the Earth from space and recommended their adoption by the General Assembly.
3. Mr. VALLE (Brazil) introduced the report of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (A/41/20 and Corr.1) on behalf of the Committee's Chairman and reviewed the three main subjects addressed by the Committee, namely, ways and means of maintaining outer space for peaceful purposes; the report of the Scientific and Technical Sub-Committee on the work of its twenty-third session (A/AC.105/369 and Corr.1); and the report of the Legal Sub-Committee on the work of its twenty-fifth session (A/AC.105/370 and Corr.1).
4. The Committee recommended that permanent observer status should be granted to the International Maritime Satellite Organization (INMARSAT), whose expertise and experience were bound to contribute constructively to the work of COPUOS in its future efforts to promote international co-operation in the peaceful uses of outer space.
5. Although all member States had felt strongly that outer space should be maintained for peaceful purposes, divergences among them regarding the proper role of COPUOS in that area had prevented it from making any significant progress on the item entitled "Ways and means of maintaining outer space for peaceful purposes". However, the debate had made it possible to clarify some of the positions held by member States, and it was hoped that such clarification would assist the General Assembly in its assessment of the situation.

(Mr. Valle, Brazil)

6. The consideration of the report of the Scientific and Technical Sub-Committee had centred primarily around the United Nations Space Applications Programme and co-ordination of outer space activities within the United Nations system, the implementation of the recommendations of the Second United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, remote sensing of the Earth by satellites and the use of nuclear power sources in outer space. In connection with the first of those items, the Committee had endorsed the programme of activities for 1987 and expressed its appreciation to the Governments, specialized agencies and other bodies which had provided assistance in connection with the holding of workshops, training courses, seminars and expert group meetings in 1986 and to those which had offered to provide assistance in connection with similar events planned for 1987. Appreciation had also been expressed to the European Space Agency (ESA) and to the Governments which had offered to renew or provide fellowships for in-depth training in 1986-1987. The Committee had noted with satisfaction that the United Nations had co-sponsored with ESA and the Pan-African Telecommunication Union (PATU) two symposia on space telecommunication in Africa.

7. In connection with the implementation of the recommendations of UNISPACE 82 regarding technical studies to be undertaken by the United Nations, specialized agencies and other international organizations, COPUOS had requested the Secretariat to seek the views of Member States on the usefulness of the five studies that had already been carried out. The activities reviewed had been financed from regular budgetary resources, supplemented by voluntary contributions from Member States and international organizations. However, the gap between the wide range of new or expanded activities recommended by UNISPACE 82 and the financial and other resources being made available for their implementation was widening, especially in respect of the United Nations Space Applications Programme. Yet, despite the severe cut in the regular budget of that programme it was hoped that the situation would soon improve.

8. The Committee had endorsed the recommendation of the Scientific and Technical Sub-Committee to the effect that a Working Group of the Whole should be established at the next session of the Sub-Committee to evaluate the implementation of the recommendations of UNISPACE 82, with a view to promoting activities relating to international co-operation, especially under the Space Applications Programme. It was hoped that the Special Political Committee would support that recommendation.

9. Progress had been made on the item entitled "Use of nuclear power sources in outer space" because the Scientific and Technical Sub-Committee had reached agreement on some aspects of the question of safety with respect to space objects with nuclear power sources on board. However, it would be up to the General Assembly to decide whether it should reconvene its Working Group on the Use of Nuclear Power Sources in Outer Space at its 1987 session, since no agreement had been reached on that matter. Deliberations on the item entitled "Remote sensing of the Earth by satellites" had not been very fruitful, but the Committee had recommended that it should be retained for consideration by the Scientific and Technical Sub-Committee as a matter of priority. The same generally applied to discussions on the examination of the physical nature and technical attributes of the geostationary orbit and on space transportation systems.

(Mr. Valle, Brazil)

10. COPUOS had endorsed the Sub-Committee's recommendations to the effect that "Space communications for development" should be adopted as the special theme for the Sub-Committee's 1987 session and that the Committee on Space Research (COSPAR) and the International Astronautical Federation (IAF) should be invited to co-operate in the organization of discussions on that theme.

11. The Legal Sub-Committee, after some 15 years of painstaking work, had succeeded in finalizing the draft principles relating to the remote sensing of the Earth from space, which would be submitted to the General Assembly for adoption on the recommendation of the Committee. The draft principles had been worked out on the basis of consensus and therefore constituted a compromise which was acceptable to all and a major step forward in the development of international space law. Significant progress had also been achieved in connection with the consideration of the possibility of supplementing the norms of international law pertaining to the use of nuclear power sources in outer space. Specifically, the Legal Sub-Committee had elaborated two draft principles, one on notification and the other on assistance to States. The Committee had endorsed both texts, and recommended that that item should be maintained on the agenda of the Legal Sub-Committee. It also recommended that the definition and delimitation of outer space and the character and utilization of the geostationary orbit should be maintained on the Sub-Committee's agenda, although it had no concrete recommendations to make to the General Assembly on that matter.

12. The Committee had requested the Legal Sub-Committee to consider the choice of a new item for its agenda at the next session, in view of the conclusion of its work on remote sensing of the Earth from space.

13. Although substantial progress had been achieved during the past year, COPUOS and its Sub-Committees had also identified a number of unresolved questions which called for careful consideration by the General Assembly. It was hoped that the Special Political Committee would be able to provide guidance in connection with some of the issues before COPUOS, with a view to promoting international co-operation in the peaceful uses of outer space.

14. Mr. HOHENFELLNER (Austria) said that mankind had witnessed dramatic accomplishments in the field of outer space in recent decades. The enormous benefits resulting from the peaceful conquest of outer space were obvious to all and should encourage increased international co-operation in that field. The United Nations and COPUOS had a special role in promoting such co-operation in order that all might share the results of scientific and technological progress in outer space, which were of vital importance to the international community.

15. The most fundamental result of the work of COPUOS was the Outer Space Treaty of 1967. Subsequent agreements negotiated in COPUOS also represented substantial contributions. After a period of several years which had not been as productive as earlier ones, COPUOS had made a major stride forward by endorsing the draft principles relating to remote sensing of the Earth from space and recommending their adoption by the General Assembly at its forty-first session. The agreement

(Mr. Hohenfellner, Austria)

reached on that set of principles demonstrated that co-operation on the basis of consensus could yield positive results and that international co-operation, even given the current difficult situation of the United Nations, could be productive.

16. The Secretary-General of the United Nations himself had drawn attention to the importance of the draft legal principles relating to remote sensing from space, in his report on the work of the Organization (A/41/1). However, there had also been other achievements, including the Scientific and Technical Committee's agreement, endorsed by COPUOS, on the establishment of a Working Group of the Whole to evaluate the implementation of the recommendations of UNISPACE 82; agreement on a number of recommendations by the Scientific and Technical Sub-Committee concerning the question of nuclear power sources in outer space; agreement on the inclusion of two new topics in the Sub-Committee's agenda entitled Matters relating to planetary exploration and astronomy; and agreement on the special theme for the Sub-Committee's next session, namely "Space communications for development". The Legal Sub-Committee had also been able to reach a consensus on two draft principles concerning nuclear power sources, and COPUOS had recommended that it should continue its work with a view to reaching a consensus on further principles. Difficulties had been encountered in connection with the elaboration of the future agenda of the Legal Sub-Committee, but it had eventually been decided that the Sub-Committee should be asked to consider the choice of a new item and made a recommendation to COPUOS with a view to reaching a consensus at its next session.
17. The results achieved during the past year were satisfactory, and the Special Political Committee and the General Assembly should ensure that the momentum was maintained and adequate preparations made for the Committee's work in 1987.
18. Despite persistent differences of opinion on the item entitled "Ways and means of maintaining outer space for peaceful purposes", his delegation had been able to make a statement reflecting the mutual understanding of the members of COPUOS, which was contained in the report.
19. Outer space must be used exclusively for peaceful purposes, and it was of the utmost importance that an agreement to that effect should be reached soon. Austria's position on that matter had been stated clearly to the First Committee on 13 October 1986. COPUOS should focus on possibilities for co-operation and for sharing the benefits of space technology, in order to play its role in the best possible manner, as had been stated eloquently by its Chairman in his opening statement to the twenty-ninth International Seminar of Diplomats on "The Future of International Co-operation in Outer Space" held at Salzburg in August 1986.
20. Mr. MARIN BOSCH (Mexico) said that in the past 30 years the entire world had witnessed the growing impact of the various uses of outer space technology. The United Nations had always stressed the need to promote international co-operation in that field. In recent years, however, the debates within COPUOS and the Special Political Committee had reflected the profound concern of the international community at the growing militarization of outer space. The immense majority of the members of COPUOS held the view that the peaceful uses of outer space

(Mr. Marin Bosch, Mexico)

were closely related to that topic and the possibility of an arms race in outer space. They had expressed serious concern over the intensification of the militarization of outer space and regretted that no progress had been made in the bilateral and multilateral negotiations held at Geneva.

21. In spite of that, a small group of delegations had felt that COPUOS should not be distracted from the task of promoting international co-operation in the peaceful use of outer space by being drawn into the areas belonging to the mandate of other forums. In that connection, he reiterated his delegation's position that the militarization of outer space ran counter to the objectives of COPUOS and, therefore, constituted a question of fundamental importance for its future, and he drew attention to the Mexico Declaration adopted at Ixtapa on 7 August 1986 in document A/41/518. The Declaration which had been signed by six countries, reiterated the demand that an arms race in outer space should be prevented and emphasized that it was particularly urgent to halt the development of anti-satellite weapons, which would threaten the peaceful space activities of many nations. The Declaration stressed that the existing treaties safeguarding the peaceful uses of outer space, as well as the 1972 Treaty on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems, should be fully honoured, strengthened and extended as necessary in the light of more recent technological advances.

22. As a step towards preventing the extension of the arms race to outer space, States should reaffirm the commitments undertaken by adopting the Declaration of Legal Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space. That could give further impetus to bilateral and multilateral negotiations in the field and strengthen machinery for promoting international co-operation in that regard.

23. The work of COPUOS had been impeded by efforts aimed at the militarization of outer space. Its reports, although adopted by "consensus", reflected the divergent views of member States on questions which the General Assembly had requested them to consider as a matter of priority. At its next session, the Scientific and Technical Sub-Committee would set up a Working Group of the Whole to assess once again the implementation of the recommendations of UNISPACE 82. In that connection, he recalled that his delegation had proposed that the space activities in which there could be greater international co-operation in the peaceful use of outer space should be identified. Accordingly, all States, particularly those with a major outer space capability, should submit to the Secretary-General their views in that regard. Such information would be very useful to the proposed Working Group. COPUOS recommended the adoption by the General Assembly of the draft principles relating to remote sensing of the Earth from space. Although the draft principles represented an acceptable solution, they did not fully reflect the interests of the developing countries with respect to the principle of sovereignty over natural resources and the terms of international co-operation in that field. Having completed the work on the draft principles, the Legal Sub-Committee would have more time to consider new questions arising from the development of space activities. He stressed the need for a positive attitude in evaluating the various proposals made in that regard. The proposal made by the Group of 77 was designed

(Mr. Marin Bosch, Mexico)

to strengthen the philosophy behind the Second United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space.

24. With respect to the question of the review of the Convention on Registration of Objects Launched into Outer Space, he stressed the need to give further consideration to the objectives set forth in the preamble to the Convention: the establishment by the Secretary-General of a central register of objects launched into outer space, the provision to States Parties of additional means and procedures to assist in the identification of space objects, and contributing to the application and development of international law governing the exploration and use of outer space. The small number of States Parties to the Convention was due to a certain extent to the doubts which certain countries had concerning the practical value of the registration system envisaged in the Convention. A number of countries, including his own, had insisted on the need to strengthen the provisions of the Convention concerning the marks identifying space objects. The passage of time had shown that those countries were right and had demonstrated the urgent need to provide the Secretary-General with timely and detailed information on all space objects launched, their general function and potential contribution to the peaceful exploration and use of outer space.

25. Mr. RODRIGUEZ MEDINA (Colombia) requested that document A/AC.105/360 containing a letter dated 16 October 1985 from the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations should again be made available to the members of the Committee because it was germane to the Committee's debate on agenda item 72.

26. The CHAIRMAN said that, in accordance with the request made by the representative of Colombia, document A/AC.105/360 would be made available to the members of the Committee.

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.