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Wednesday, 6 November 1991
at 10 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 18th MEETING

Chairman:

Mr. SCHAFER (Vice-Chairman)

(Germany)

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 71: INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE (continued)

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In the absence of the Chairman, Mr. Schafer (Germany), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 71: INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE (continued) (A/46/20 and A/46/389)

- 1. Mr. GONZALEZ (Chile) said that the holding in Chile of the Second Space Conference of the Americas in 1992 underscored Chile's interest in encouraging and promoting regional cooperation in the spirit of the recommendations of the Second United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNISPACE 82) and the goals of International Space Year.
- 2. It was in the field of outer space that the differences between the countries which created and therefore possessed advanced technology and the countries which used that technology were perhaps most marked, in spite of the fact that the development of both groups of countries was closely interrelated and dependent on such technology in crucial areas such as communications and the discovery of natural resources. In general, the developed countries took an active part in the Committee's Scientific and Technical Subcommittee while the developing countries, which lacked space technology, expressed their views and had more scope for stating their needs, aspirations and interests in the Legal Subcommittee. The development of international space law was the most viable way for those countries to gain access to such technology. On their behalf, his delegation appealed to States Members of the United Nations to reestablish the principle of international cooperation on juster and more equitable bases by means of a normative framework which would enable developing countries to participate more actively in space technology and its applications.
- During the past year progress had been made on substantive questions relating to the negotiations on the peaceful uses of outer space. In the case of the geostationary orbit, the Group of 77 had submitted an innovative proposal containing important ideas which, his delegation hoped, would lead to active and productive discussion focused on the concept of equitable access to the geostationary orbit. Important progress had also been made with respect to the new item, "Consideration of the legal aspects related to the application of the principle that the exploration and utilization of outer space should be carried out for the benefit and in the interest of all States, taking into particular account the needs of developing countries." A working paper submitted by the Group of 77 had put forward the idea that principles should be worked out in specific areas of international cooperation to make them effective. In addition, the relationship between the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and the Ad Hoc Committee of the Conference on Disarmament on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space had been clarified, and the Conference itself had underscored the need to establish contacts between the two bodies. His delegation had therefore proposed that

(Mr. Gonzalez, Chile)

the Conference on Disarmament should be asked to prepare a report on the number of meetings and the progress made by the Ad Hoc Committee and that the proceedings and records of the Conference with respect to outer space and its peaceful uses should be circulated to the Committee.

- 4. The Discovery shuttle had recently been forced to evade some of the dangerous debris that existed in outer space, a fact which underscored the need to study that subject and to give it the priority it deserved. His delegation appealed to those countries that doubted the political and technical importance of the question to reconsider their position in order to make possible substantive and productive discussion of it.
- 5. Lastly, his delegation considered that account should be taken in the new world order of the legitimate aspirations of all United Nations Member States to juster living conditions in conformity with the United Nations Charter. From that point of view, outer space should be used for peaceful purposes and for the benefit and in the interests of all, taking into particular account the developing countries.
- 6. Mr. HERNANDEZ BASAVE (Mexico) said that the end of the cold war made it possible to hope that the international community would be able to progress towards the consolidation of a stable system of peace and security; to do so it would be necessary to overcome the great economic and social disparities between the developed world and the developing peoples. Recent political events had created a general awareness of the need to reactivate the United Nations and his delegation reiterated its firm commitment to contribute to the strengthening of the Organization's role.
- 7. His delegation regretted that two United Nations bodies in which questions relating to the use of outer space, the Conference on Disarmament and the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, had not yet benefited from the new reactivation efforts. The question of the militarization of outer space had been a priority subject for almost a decade in both bodies. In neither of them, however, had it been possible to begin serious and substantive work to reserve outer space exclusively for peaceful uses, while its militarization continued at an accelerated rate. It was anomalous that the improvement of the world situation had not brought with it the political will to move towards the complete demilitarization of outer space and a guarantee that it would be used exclusively for peaceful purposes for the benefit of all mankind and to promote effective international cooperation for development. That was the spirit which should guide the Committee's work.
- 8. His delegation was concerned at the little progress made in recent years in the Committee's two Subcommittees. In the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee no progress had been made on practically any of the agenda items except that of the use of nuclear energy sources in outer space. Nor had much attention been paid to the application of the recommendations of UNISPACE 82.

A/SPC/46/SR.18 English Page 4

(Mr. Hernandez Basave, Mexico)

- 9. However, his delegation acknowledged the efforts made by the Outer Space Division to promote programmes of multilateral cooperation on space subjects. In spite of its scant financial resources, the Programme on Space Applications had held important courses and seminars, contributing to the training of scientists and technicians in the developing countries.
- 10. His delegation attached particular importance to the General Assembly's recommendation that regional training centres in space science and technology should be established. During the Committee's thirty-fourth session, Mexico had announced its offer to provide the site for the Regional Centre for Latin America and the Caribbean in the offices of the Mexican Institute of Communications, a subsidiary of the Communications and Transport Secretariat which, inter alia, coordinated Mexican space activities. The Institute was designing a new satellite system which would cover various countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, facilitating their access to data banks.
- 11. His delegation supported the recommendation made by the General Assembly that the Committee give greater attention to questions relating to the protection of the space environment. It therefore reiterated its support of Sweden's proposal that the Committee begin its consideration of the item on space debris.
- 12. Extremely limited progress had been made during 1991 in the work of the Legal Subcommittee on the development of international space law. The negotiations on the definition and delimitation of outer space and the character and utilization of the geostationary orbit remained at a standstill, and it had not been possible to conclude the elaboration of draft principles relevant to the use of nuclear power sources in outer space. He hoped that the necessary political will would be forthcoming to enable the Committee to submit a final text on the question to the General Assembly in 1992.
- 13. The machinery for and means of ensuring the equitable distribution of the benefits derived from space activities would be more effective if the principle contained in article I of the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies were respected. His country, together with other members of the Group of 77, had proposed that principles should be drawn up concerning international cooperation in the exploration and peaceful uses of outer space in order to promote such cooperation and ensure that the benefits derived from space activities were distributed fairly and in such a way as to assist all peoples in their efforts to achieve economic and social development.
- 14. The current international political situation required a change in attitude in order to strengthen the role of the United Nations, and space activities were a sector which could serve to promote international cooperation. With that in view, the holding of International Space Year in 1992 should help to revitalize the Committee's work.

- 15. Mr. MAHMOOD (Pakistan) said that the militarization of outer space was a serious impediment to its use for peaceful purposes. Consideration of that issue in the Outer Space Committee could serve to supplement the work of the Conference on Disarmament.
- 16. He welcomed the fact that the United Nations Programme on Space Applications had expanded in scope over the years. However, despite repeated appeals, the Programme did not have the necessary funds to meet the essential requirements of developing countries. His own country had made a regular financial contribution to the Programme since 1984.
- 17. He hoped that the evaluation of the implementation of the recommendations of the Second United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space would lead to a further improvement in the execution of the various activities concerning international cooperation in the field in question. Closer coordination was needed on the programmes undertaken by the various agencies in the United Nations system concerning space technology applications, taking into account the needs of the developing countries.
- 18. His country attached particular importance to international cooperation in the field of remote sensing. It was concerned at the excessive commercialization of remote-sensing activities and services offered by the satellite-operating States, which served to discourage participation by developing countries because of the high costs involved. Developed and developing countries needed to share relevant information and technology.
- 19. Pakistan was disappointed that the Legal Subcommittee had been unable to complete its consideration of the draft principles relevant to the use of nuclear power sources in outer space at its thirtieth session, and hoped that the Subcommittee would be able to reach a consensus on the remaining principles at its following session. It was essential to establish an international legal regime for outer space, which must be distinguished from the legal regime for national airspace. The concept of outer space must first be clearly defined, however.
- 20. It was vital for all States to have equitable and fair access to the geostationary orbit, without prejudice to the role of the International Telecommunication Union. In view of the unique and limited nature of the geostationary orbit, a special legal regime should be established to guarantee its availability to all nations, taking particular account of the needs of developing countries, which should be given preferential treatment.
- 21. A further matter of major concern to the international community was the need to find a way of removing space debris and satellites from the geostationary orbit. The problem needed to be solved by scientific and technological means, and the launching States had to exercise the necessary restraint. It was therefore extremely important that the Outer Space Committee should continue its consideration of the question.

A/SPC/46/SR.18 English Page 6

- 22. Mr. EXARCHOS (Greece) said that his country had participated actively in the work of the Outer Space Committee and its two subcommittees. Together with other Member States and various international and regional organizations, Greece would continue to work towards strengthening, expanding and promoting international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space.
- 23. In its resolution 44/46 of 8 December 1989, the General Assembly had endorsed the participation of the United Nations in International Space Year. In view of the importance of the United Nations Programme on Space Applications, his Government had made a voluntary contribution of \$US 7,000 to the relevant trust fund.
- 24. His Government was organizing an international seminar on space communication systems, particularly on applications of INMARSAT for the benefit of States members of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). Greece had also held a national essay competition, and the entries selected had been submitted to the Outer Space Affairs Division. It had furthermore developed educational programmes covering various space applications for use in universities, where the main focus would be on geological and agricultural applications of remote sensing, as well as for use in government departments and agencies where the main applications would be satellite communications and meteorology particularly at the Hellenic Telecommunications Agency, which managed the ground stations and administered the country's participation in INTELSAT, INMARSAT and EUTELSAT, and at the National Meteorological Service, which ran a graduate meteorology school for its staff, including courses on satellite meteorology.
- 25. Accordingly, Greece attached great importance to the development of space law and had ratified such international legal instruments as the Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapons Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and under Water, signed on 5 August 1963 and ratified by Act 4335/1963, the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, signed on 27 January 1967 and ratified by Decree 670/1970, the Agreement on the Rescue of Astronauts, the Return of Astronauts and the Return of Objects Launched into Outer Space, signed on 22 April 1968 and ratified by Decree 189/1974, and the Convention on International Liability for Damage Caused by Space Objects, signed on 29 March 1972 and ratified by Act 563/1977.
- 26. The Greek Government had initiated the process for accession to the Convention on Registration of Objects Launched into Outer Space, adopted by the General Assembly on 12 November 1974.
- 27. Mr. LE KHAC TRUNG (Viet Nam) said that in the past 30 years technological developments in the field of outer space had progressed enormously; the world was currently entering an era in which space science would exert an even greater influence on living conditions and quality of life. While outer space had tremendous scientific and economic potential, it could also pose a fatal threat to mankind, because attempts were still being made to extend the arms

(Mr. Le Khac Trung, Viet Nam)

race into outer space; that would have an adverse effect on international relations and would entail the squandering of large amounts of resources which were urgently needed for development.

- 28. Unfortunately, the debates on ways of maintaining outer space exclusively for peaceful purposes and on the question of safe use of nuclear power sources in outer space had not yet yielded the hoped-for results.
- 29. A distinction must be drawn between the legal regime governing airspace and the legal regime governing outer space and the character and utilization of the geostationary orbit must be defined. He expressed the hope that the international community would soon be in a position to draft the new space law and the legal regime on the utilization of the geostationary orbit in the interest of all countries.
- 30. The spin-off benefits of space technology and remote-sensing information played a very important role in social and economic development. Accordingly, they should be made available to the developing countries in the spirit of true international cooperation.
- 31. Currently no part of the globe was immune from serious deterioration of the environment which threatened social and economic development and the very existence of mankind. Mindful of that threat, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development was scheduled to meet in Rio de Janeiro within six months. It was gratifying to see that the activities of International Space Year would focus in large part on the use of space technology to study and monitor the environment. In that connection, Viet Nam supported the proposal that the question of space debris should be considered in the future deliberations of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space.
- 32. Viet Nam attached the utmost importance to the United Nations Programme on Space Applications and to the efforts of the Outer Space Affairs Division to develop an international space information system. In that connection he pointed out that the programme of the National Committee for Space Research and Applications, which had been established in Viet Nam in 1980, assigned high priority to remote sensing. At the same time, within the context of the INTERCOSMOS programme, some airborne experiments had been carried out using multispectral cameras for data analysis to serve the national economy and development planning. In connection with a UNDP/FAO project, facilities for visual interpretation techniques had been set up and some ground stations had been installed to receive cloud pictures from meteorological satellites.
- 33. Space activities had brought with them tremendous achievements for human civilization and had come to form part of the daily lives of millions of people. The Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space had made a considerable contribution to those developments. However, not much progress had been made on legal matters and, as a result, existing international instruments did not, as yet, provide an appropriate framework for space activities.

A/SPC/46/SR.19 English Page 8

(Mr. Le Khac Trung, Viet Nam)

- 34. He hoped that the end of the cold war and the possibility that confrontation in international relations would be replaced by cooperation, would encourage all States to surmount the remaining differences and pave the way for more effective international cooperation in the exploration and utilization of outer space for exclusively peaceful purposes.
- 35. Mr. MOTOMURA (Japan), noting that some progress had been made on the draft principles on nuclear power sources in outer space, expressed the hope that the remaining principles could be finalized and that consensus could be reached as soon as possible on the draft principles as a whole.
- 36. It was gratifying to note that the working group on the new item entitled "spin-off benefits of space technology", had begun its substantive work; he hoped that that important item would give rise to a fruitful exchange of views based on specific information on existing national legal frameworks and international agreements.
- 37. With respect to space environment, the problem of the rapid accumulation of debris in outer space posed a serious threat to space and Earth environment and to future space activities. He urged members of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee to share the findings obtained from their national research programmes with one another. In that regard, his delegation agreed that the issue of space debris should be placed on the agenda of the Scientific and Legal Subcommittee, so as to provide an opportunity for exchanging views and information derived from national research.
- 38. There were two aspects of space technology nuclear power sources and remote sensing and since an accident involving a satellite with a nuclear power source on board could have lethal consequences for the Earth's ecology and the human environment, his delegation welcomed the Committee's decision to endorse the Subcommittee's recommendation that the new theme to be given special attention at its 1992 session should be "Space technology and the protection of the Earth's environment".
- 39. His delegation also welcomed the initiative of international scientific organizations and bodies in designating 1992 International Space Year (ISY), for that would provide a suitable opportunity to enhance international cooperation and ensure that all countries, particularly the developing countries, benefited from the exploration and utilization of outer space. In close collaboration with the United Nations and other relevant organizations the Government of Japan was to be a co-sponsor of the United Nations Regional Workshop on Space Technology for Resource Development and Environment Management, in Quito, Ecuador. It would also host a conference on earth/space science and technology to be held in Tokyo in the autumn of 1992 as part of the ISY activities in the Asian and Pacific region, with the participation of some 1,000 experts from all the countries of the region. The activities planned for Tokyo in 1992 included a seminar on the utilization of remote-sensing technology for disaster prevention and training courses on remote-sensing technology and satellite-communications engineering.

(Mr. Motomura, Japan)

- 40. It was to be hoped that, taking advantage of the favourable conditions resulting from the easing of tensions in international relations, the General Assembly would adopt by consensus the draft resolution designed to enhance the work of COPUOS and its two Subcommittees.
- 41. Mr. NEUHAUS (Australia) said that in 1967, only 10 years after the launch of Sputnik, Australia had become the third country in the world, after the Soviet Union and the United States, to launch a satellite into orbit from its own territory and it had remained a leader in radio astronomy, deep-space tracking, remote sensing, and many other areas. It had been providing ground support for satellite-based communications; since 1958 the United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) had had ground stations in Australia, as had the European Space Agency more recently. The INTELSAT ground station at Perth used mostly Australian technology, and Australian companies had contracts for the INTELSAT Pacific and Indian Ocean satellites. It was hoped that "Endoavour", the Australian experimental ultraviolet telescope, which was the most sophisticated piece of Australian space technology, would be launched into space in January 1992 on board the NASA space shuttle Discovery.
- 42. In the area of remote sensing, Australia had supplied equipment for the European ERS-1 satellite, was making a major investment in installations to receive data from that satellite, and was building additional equipment for ERS-2. It was also making a major investment in the Tasmanian earth-resources satellite station at Hobart, which would enable ERS-1 to collect data from a much larger area, including the southern part of the Indian Ocean and the Tasman Sea. Remote sensing was one of the most promising of all the possible peaceful uses of outer space.
- 43. As part of International Space Year his country planned to host important programmes for the study of land-cover change, as well as projects on sea-surface temperature and the productivity of the oceans; it intended to contribute to those activities and supply data for the programmes on the encyclopaedia and atlas of global change, as well as participating as an investigator in the Topex-Poseidon ocean topography satellite project. It would also be cooperating with the Soviet Union in the Radioastron project.
- 44. Turning to the thirty-fourth session of COPUOS, held in Graz, he said that it was important to continue the effort to achieve consensus among the participating countries. Since the Chernobyl accident the world had a greater duty than ever before to observe stringent safety standards in the matter of nuclear power sources. With regard to the draft principles relevant to the use of nuclear power sources in outer space, it was disappointing that agreement had still not been reached on principle 3 despite seeming within reach after 13 years of intense and difficult negotiations. The world was moving into a new era in which decisions once taken unilaterally were now subject to multilateral consideration and seen in a broader and ultimately more satisfactory perspective. There was no clearer example than the

A/SPC/46/SR.18 English Page 10

(Mr. Neuhaus, Australia)

multilateral action led by the United Nations in 1991 in the Gulf war. It would be a great pity if COPUOS could not complete its work on all the draft principles in 1992. However, it was heartening that agreement had been reached on principles 8 and 9.

- 45. Multilateralism should also be the hallmark of the approach to the issue of space debris. It was impossible to continue dumping refuse at random on the planet's surface, or indeed in the region of space surrounding the biosphere. If debris was allowed to continue to accumulate indiscriminately in that region, the risk would increase in the short term that space missions, manned and unmanned, would suffer accidents or even disasters. The countries which used outer space had a special responsibility to preserve the environment of space so that other nations could also make use of it in exercise of their legitimate right. His country appreciated the work being done by individual countries with respect to space debris but reiterated its firm view that it was already time to include the issue in the agenda of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee.
- 46. The same could be said with respect to the geostationary orbit. Australia had supported the proposal that States should examine in COPUOS the feasibility of drawing up new guidelines which would result in the removal of any of the current geostationary orbit guidelines which had ceased to be useful. It would pursue the question at the 1992 meeting.
- 47. The CHAIRMAN announced that the Committee's next meeting would be held on Thursday, 7 November 1991, at 3 p.m.

The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.