General Assembly

FORTY-SIXTH SESSION

Official Records

SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE
20th meeting
held on
Friday, 8 November 1991
at 10 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 20th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. SCHAFER (Germany)
(Vice-Chairman)

CONTENTS

Distr. GENERAL
A/SPC/46/SR.20
25 November 1991
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: SPANISH

91-57220 5317S (E)

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

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

AGENDA ITEM 37: POLICIES OF APARTHEID OF THE GOVERNMENT OF SOUTH AFRICA (A/SPC/46/L.4 and Add.1-5)

1. The CHAIRMAN said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee agreed to the requests for hearings contained in documents A/SPC/46/L.4 and addenda 1-5.

2. It was so decided.

AGENDA ITEM 71: INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE (continued) (A/SPC/46/L.11)

(a) REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE (A/46/20)

(b) IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATION OF THE SECOND UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE EXPLORATION AND PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/46/389)

3. Mr. TISLER (Czechoslovakia) said, with respect to the work of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee, that the programme on space applications had been conducted effectively despite the limited financing available. The fellowships and technical advisory services provided by the Subcommittee, as well as the seminars and workshops organized in cooperation with various international organizations, were particularly praiseworthy. The International Space Information Service was very useful and might be extended in future to provide information as well on individual space objects and missions and on other matters dealing with outer space itself. The question of the space environment likewise had to be addressed. The General Assembly, in its resolution 45/72, had considered that space debris could be an appropriate subject for discussion by the Outer Space Committee in the future, but the subject had not yet appeared on the agenda of the Subcommittee.

4. The Legal Subcommittee had failed to adopt the set of principles on the use of nuclear power sources in outer space, although it had seemed that consensus on the item was within reach. Neither had any progress been achieved on the definition of outer space and on the geostationary orbit, no doubt owing to the combination of the two subjects into one agenda item.

5. Even though no consensus had been reached on the whole set of principles, the meeting of the Outer Space Committee had adopted two additional principles: principle 8 on responsibility and principle 9 on liability and compensation. Her delegation welcomed the proposal to reconvene the Working Group on the Use of Nuclear Power Sources in Outer Space of the Scientific and

(Mr. Tisler, Czechoslovakia)

Technical Subcommittee to assist in finalizing the draft set of principles at the next meeting of the Legal Subcommittee.

6. With respect to the urgent question of space debris, which had not yet been formally put on the agenda of the Committee and its subcommittees, the General Assembly could take into account the proposals and expectations of a large number of delegations and request the Committee and its subcommittees to deal with the matter of space debris as a formal and urgent item on its agenda.

7. Although not a space Power, Czechoslovakia had participated the previous year in outer space research within the Hexagonale and the multilateral international project Interball, in cooperative projects with the European Space Agency and EUMETSAT and joint projects with Italy and Austria and in a meeting with UNITAR on the application of geographical systems in managing natural resources and protecting the living environment in Czechoslovakia.

8. In conclusion, he said that Czechoslovakia was prepared for a broad exchange of experience on outer space research and its practical benefits with all States.

9. Mr. MEHRA (India) said that India firmly supported the peaceful use of outer space and that political will was needed on the global scale to keep outer space a zone of peace and to contain the arms race in space. Only in that way could all humankind benefit from outer space activities. Accordingly, India was paying particular attention to the use of space technology in areas pertinent to its rapid development and to the development of the necessary national capacity through appropriate international cooperation. In that way, India had made appreciable progress over the years and was currently employing various useful spin-offs from space technology in such areas as communications, broadcasting, education, meteorology and natural resource management.

10. India had recently launched its second remote sensing satellite, the IRS-1B, aboard a Soviet Vostok rocket. The satellite, which had been placed in a 904-kilometre-high orbit, was principally designed to obtain remote sensing data on natural resources, particularly for the management of agricultural and natural resources and the observation of natural phenomena. The data were being used for various purposes, such as the forecasting of crop yields, observation of fallow lands and identification of arable land, the preparation of maps of areas lending themselves to groundwater extraction, mineral prospecting, forest resource conservation, assessment of flood damage, development of fisheries, identification of drought control measures, and so on.

11. With respect to the system of geostationary satellites, the multipurpose INSAT-1D satellite was providing vital support to telecommunications, television broadcasting, the transmission of meteorological images and the publication of data, the national broadcasting network system and disaster

(Mr. Mehra, India)

alert services. The second-generation satellite systems of that series, INSAT-II, was being manufactured in India; it was hoped that the first satellite of the series would be launched the following year. Efforts were also continuing to develop appropriate launch pads.

12. With regard to the work of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, his delegation welcomed the progress toward a common understanding of the draft principles relating to the safe use of nuclear power sources in outer space - the principles relating to responsibility and liability and compensation - and hoped that during the following session of the Legal Subcommittee an agreement could be reached on the whole set of principles governing the matter.

13. His delegation had previously observed that in order for spin-off benefits of space technology to be enjoyed by all developing countries, it was of supreme importance to maintain an appropriate international climate and to develop measures to provide greater assistance to developing countries. In that effort, the United Nations Programme on Space Applications could play a fundamental role. It was necessary, too, to remove obstacles to the free flow of technical information and to supply developing countries with equipment, technology and training materials for various peaceful applications. His delegation considered very important in that regard the new agenda item of the Legal Subcommittee on access to outer space benefits.

14. With respect to the problem of the growing quantity of space debris, his delegation considered that the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space should play an active role, in particular by examining various international aspects of the question. His delegation therefore supported that Committee's call for new research, technological development and the exchange of information.

15. With regard to the promotion of international cooperation in the space sector, his country had hosted and co-sponsored a United Nations European Space Agency (ESA) Workshop on Basic Space Research for States in the ESCAP and ESCWA regions, in line with the recommendations of the Second United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNISPACE 82). It was also collaborating with other developing countries, by sharing its experiences of space applications through the SHARES programme. In September 1991 his country had hosted a meeting of the directors of national centres and programmes for remote sensing in the ESCAP region, as well as the eighth meeting of the Intergovernmental Consultative Committee.

16. In connection with International Space Year, to be held in 1992, there was an encouraging awareness of the importance of the "Mission to Planet Earth", and he hoped that the Year would bring closer the establishment of a sounder basis for the continuing use of outer space for peaceful purposes in the service of mankind. He also hoped that the profound changes which had occurred on the international stage in the brief space of one year would

(Mr. Mehra, India)

stimulate the rapid introduction of fresh measures aimed at maintaining outer space as a zone of peace and curbing the arms race in outer space so as to promote the exploration of space for peaceful purposes and the extension of the benefits to all nations.

17. Mrs. FLORES (Uruguay) said that her country again wished to reiterate its appreciation of the work accomplished by COPUOS, of which it had been a permanent member since 1981. For more than 30 years, the Committee had been undertaking essential work in the framing of space law notable above all for its far-sightedness and universal scope.

18. The international community now had a legal framework for the development of space activities. Despite the progress made, however, reality tended increasingly to run ahead of the provisions in force and the progressive development of international space law was now imperative.

19. Her delegation considered that there were areas where agreement was needed, such as determining the boundary between outer space and airspace, given the increase in space activities and the need to determine which legal regime was applicable to specific cases, and the geostationary orbit, which, as a limited and heterogenous natural resource located in outer space, formed part of the common heritage of mankind . Although all members of the international community were entitled to use it, in practice access was limited because of the technological requirements and high costs involved.

20. To assist in technical studies and research, the exploration and utilization of the geostationary orbit, and the equitable distribution of the benefits, an international organization should be set up with the aim of ensuring access to and use of the orbit for all States on a rational and equitable basis.

21. In considering 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 interests of all States, taking into particular account the needs of developing countries, the focus should be on cooperation, which should be translated into firm achievements. She also hoped that a final text could be agreed as soon as possible for the draft principles relevant to the use of nuclear power sources in outer space.

22. Her delegation considered that special attention should be paid to questions related to the protection of the outer space environment, especially those potentially affecting the Earth's environment. Specifically, consideration should be given to drawing up a convention to deal with problems of particular urgency, such as the possibility of removing space debris, with special emphasis on establishing provisions for the prevention of space pollution, laying down environmental standards and other related questions.

(Mrs. Flores, Uruguay)

23. Despite the significant changes which had occurred in the world, the demilitarization of space was still an important issue. Her delegation wished once again to stress the need to promote international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space and the need for technological advances and information derived from space exploration to be placed at the service of mankind, especially the developing countries, through the launching of joint projects, participation plans and so on.

24. Lastly, the celebration of International Space Year in 1992, to coincide with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Outer Space Treaty and the tenth anniversary of UNISPACE 82 would undoubtedly give fresh impetus to the planned objectives.

25. Mr. ZAWELS (Argentina) said that working paper A/AC.105/C.2/L.182, submitted by his own and other delegations, on principles regarding international cooperation in the exploration and utilization of outer space for peaceful purposes offered a firm basis for a more extensive analysis of a subject closely linked to the Committee's raison d'être. With regard to the question of the geostationary orbit, the "working non-paper" submitted by various States members of the Group of 77 sought to encourage a constructive and open consideration of the issue. In that connection, the delegations of Argentina, Australia and Czechoslovakia wished to draw attention to the question of clearing up the geostationary orbit once the satellites stationed there had reached the end of their useful life. With regard to the definition and delimitation of outer space, he looked forward with interest to the document on international legal aspects of future exploitation of aerospace systems.

26. As for the consideration of ways and means of maintaining outer space for peaceful purposes, he considered that outer space should be used not only in a peaceful manner, but also in the service and for the development of the whole of mankind. Steps should therefore be taken to prevent an arms race in outer space and the Commitee could establish methods and procedures to ensure that space was used for peaceful purposes.

27. Forging closer ties between parties with opposing interests, exchanging information and developing closer cooperation would all be confidence-building measures. Given that COPUOS and the Ad Hoc Committee on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space were complementary in nature, it would be very useful to establish an informal mechanism for exchanging information between the Chairmen of the two bodies, in the interests of more effective utilization of the Organization's resources.

28. He deplored the fact that the recommendations of UNISPACE 82 had still not been properly implemented and pointed out that the Programme on Space Applications had been inadequate, despite its efficiency in using the resources available. The countries more advanced in space technology had a

(Mr. Zawels, Argentina)

responsibility to support a programme which was of such importance to the developing countries.

29. It was vitally important for an international legal regime to be gradually established for the proper regulation of space activities, taking account of the interests of all countries, particularly the developing countries. The system should promote international cooperation and the development of research and seek to ensure that the exploration and utilization of outer space continued to be for exclusively peaceful purposes. In that connection, the United Nations could play an important role in the context of international, regional and subregional plans by providing legal frameworks and appropriate incentives.

30. Lastly, his delegation hoped that draft resolution A/SPC/46/L.11 would be adopted.

31. Mr. ZAHERI (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that it was of paramount importance to make the public aware of the benefits and advantages of the various applications of space science and technology. His country was consequently looking forward to the special activities of the International Space Year in 1992 that would promoting communication among people, including authorities and decision-makers. The Islamic Republic of Iran had in 1990 been working on the establishment of a national space agency that would coordinate all matters related to space and its peaceful applications. The College of Air and Space Science had been set up, to coordinate major research work and offer graduate study in various fields related to space science and technology. Currently, several universities were offering graduate-level courses in communication, with a specialization in satellite communication.

32. The Islamic Republic of Iran stood ready to host a regional centre for education in space science and technology, which would be of benefit particularly to the developing countries. In the past several years, many technical seminars and workshops had been held on the latest advances in satellite communication and his country had begun to implement satellite communication technology. Very small aperture terminal (VSAT) technology had been used to serve the most remote areas of the country, as had INTELSAT transponders to provide the space segment for domestic and international satellite services. The establishment and implementation of a domestic satellite network system was also being carefully planned.

33. The International Space Year would also provide a good opportunity to evaluate how successful the implementation of the recommendations and guidelines of UNISPACE 82 had been, given the concerns about their implementation, the progress of which should be monitored by the Working Group of the Whole.

34. The Islamic Republic of Iran, a country that had suffered severe earthquakes, had followed with interest the work of the Office of the United

(Mr. Zaheri, Islamic Republic of Iran)

Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO), particularly in the area of communication, and had experienced firsthand the importance of establishing the initial lines of communication during the first hours of rescue efforts. It therefore fully supported the recommendations of the 1990 UNDRO International Conference on Disaster Communications, and also the convening of a conference in 1993 to negotiate an intergovernmental convention on disaster communications. More seminars and workshops should be organized to provide comprehensive information about the science and technology of how to prevent disasters and how best to apply space technology to minimize damage. It was encouraging to note that several seminars were scheduled to be held in 1992 on the matter.

35. On the question of the need for easy access by developing countries to remote sensing information, the Islamic Republic of Iran shared the view that the growing commercialization of remote sensing activities, coupled with their high cost, was an impediment to the peaceful use of that technology. As a matter of principle, his Government believed that all space and space-related activities should be managed and performed in such a way as to protect the interests of other countries. In that regard, close attention should be paid to the use of nuclear power sources, which should be an important topic for the Committee's next session in 1992. Moreover, coordination of efforts between the Conference on Disarmament and the Committee was essential in developing the non-military use of space. The atmosphere and outer space, including the geostationary orbit, were God-given natural resources that should be kept clean and utilized in a just way by all humanity.

36. Lastly, his delegation called for the cooperation of all countries, developed and developing, in working towards the peaceful application of space and space-related science and technology to medicine, agriculture and environmental protection as well as communication.

37. Mr. JOEDO (Indonesia) said that the demilitarization of outer space was an essential prerequisite for fruitful cooperation. Without denying the Committee's right to identify areas suitable for the peaceful uses of outer space, Indonesia considered that the Conference on Disarmament had the primary responsibility with regard to aspects pertaining to peace and security. It supported the idea of establishing a working relationship between the two bodies.

38. It was of paramount importance to emphasize the relationship between peace, disarmament and environmental protection, since non-peaceful uses of outer space not only endangered peace and cooperation but also had a serious negative impact on the space environment. Every State involved in space activities should take all necessary precautions, since the pollution of outer space was one of the most crucial issues currently facing humanity.

39. Indonesia welcomed the priority given to the item on the implementation of the recommendations of UNISPACE 82, and also the reestablishment of its

(Mr. Joedo, Indonesia)

Working Group of the Whole, which was particularly necessary in the context of the United Nations Programme on Space Applications. It shared the concern of other developing countries over the lack of financial resources to implement the UNISPACE 82 recommendations, for it attached great importance to the workshops, training programmes and seminars organized by UNISPACE 82 to assist developing countries. Indonesia had recently participated in a workshop in basic space science organized jointly by the Outer Space Affairs Division of the United Nations and ESA in India. For the past several years, his country had been active in the PALAPA satellite communication system and had contributed substantially to the efforts of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to promote regional cooperation.

40. It was heartening to note, with respect to the International Space Year, the many activities planned with the joint participation of international organizations like the Committee on Space Research (COSPAR), the International Aeronautical Federation (IAF), the International Society of Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing (ISPRS) and the Space Agency Forum for International Space Year (SAFISY). International Space Year activities could complement the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in connection with the use of technology for studying and monitoring the global environment.

41. His delegation underscored the importance of a definition of outer space and of the character and utilization of the geostationary orbit. In its view, the two issues were closely interlinked by their very nature and called for a sui generis regime, in view of the fact that the orbit was becoming increasingly saturated even before developing countries had achieved the capability to use it. The Committee must continue its discussions in order to arrive at a solution acceptable to all, which would take into account the special requirements of the developing countries and the preferential rights of the equatorial countries.

42. On the subject of remote sensing, he stressed the importance of ensuring the continuity and complementarity of systems and of promoting cooperation between the users, the satellite operators and the ground station operators. There was an urgent need to increase the participation of developing countries and at the same time reduce the fees for access to the data, so that all humanity could benefit fully. Indonesia had established several educational and training centres to support space research, constructed laboratories and facilities, and developed the capability to receive data from the LANDSAT and SPOT systems.

43. His delegation was pleased to note that the Legal Subcommittee would continue its consideration of the use of nuclear power sources in outer space since Indonesia had always been concerned at the danger posed by the re-entry of satellites powered by nuclear energy and their debris. It was gratifying to note the consensus reached on the text of the two draft principles concerning responsibility, and liability and compensation.

(Mr. Joedo, Indonesia)

44. In view of the study prepared by the Outer Space Affairs Division on the spin-off benefits of space technology, Indonesia believed that the United Nations had a pivotal role to play in promoting broad sharing by all countries in those benefits and hoped that the working group on that question would continue its deliberations during the next session of the Legal Subcommittee in order to formulate draft principles based on the special needs and interests of the developing countries. It was essential to build upon the success achieved thus far in furthering cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space in accordance with the needs and aspirations of mankind as a whole.

45. Ms. DAPUL (Philippines) said that her country categorically rejected the militarization of outer space. The Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) could complement the work being done in other United Nations bodies, such as the Conference on Disarmament, in order to prevent the militarization of outer space through its contributions to the discussions and negotiations under way.

46. Athough cooperation between countries with access to outer space continued to increase, there was hardly any reference to cooperation with countries that did not have access to outer space outside the programmes sponsored by the United Nations. It was true that a number of the recommendations of the Second United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space had been implemented, including the expansion of national and regional data banks, the establishment of the International Space Information Service, and studies on weather control. Nevertheless, all that fell short of the expectations that peoples from developing societies had with regard to space technology.

47. Although the lack of financing to implement the recommendations and programmes of UNISPACE 82 remained a major stumbling block in advancing international cooperation in outer space, that was not the only obstacle or even the most important one. Nations which had access to outer space and were in a position to enhance cooperation seemed to have neither the desire nor the will to change the status quo. The space Powers, which were also developed countries, had a stake in ensuring the viability of the planet, whose physical problems were associated with under-development. Space applications could help solve environmental problems, which, as was known, respected no boundaries. COPUOS, therefore, should consider the question of international cooperation in space as a top priority and a matter of urgency.

48. Her delegation once again stressed the importance of continuing efforts to ensure the continuity and compatibility of remote-sensing systems and expressed concern at the commercialization of remote-sensing activities. The high access fees for remote-sensing data made it difficult for developing countries to use them. That was of particular concern for the Philippines, which was prone to natural disasters and relied heavily on such technology.

(Ms. Dapul, Philippines)

49. The Philippines shared international concern over the hazards posed to man and the environment by the unplanned re-entry into the Earth's atmosphere of malfunctioning space objects with nuclear power sources on board. Her delegation was pleased to note that COPUOS had been able to reach a consensus on the text of two draft principles relevant to the use of nuclear power sources in outer space. She referred to draft principle 8, on responsibility, and draft principle 9, on liability and compensation, and hoped that the set of draft principles would soon be finalized for adoption.

50. With regard to space debris, the consequences to the space and Earth environment of a possible collision between manned spacecraft and space debris were too terrible to contemplate. Her delegation, therefore, agreed that there was a need for further research concerning space debris, for the development of improved technology for the monitoring of such debris and for the compilation and dissemination of data on that subject.

51. In view of the looming gap between space technology and the elaboration of laws governing its use, her delegation believed that the time was opportune for the further development of space law. In that regard, the Philippines attached importance to the application of the principal that the exploration and utilization of outer space should be carried out for the benefit and in the interests of all States. As a sponsor of the working paper which contained those draft principles, her delegation expressed the hope that the substantive work on that subject would begin in a duly constituted working group.

Draft resolution A/SPC/46/L.11

52. The CHAIRMAN said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee wished to adopt draft resolution A/SPC/46/L.11, introduced by the representative of Austria on 7 November.

53. It was so decided.

Programme budget implications of draft resolution adopted by the Committee

54. The CHAIRMAN, referring to the programme budget implications of the draft resolution contained in document A/SPC/46/L.11, said that the Programme Planning and Budget Division had informed the Committee that draft resolution A/SPC/46/L.11, entitled "International cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space", contained various operative paragraphs relating to the programme of work in the field of outer space. The proposed programme budget for the biennium 1992-1993, in subsection B (2) (b) (Peaceful uses of outer space) of section 3 (Political and Security Council Affairs), provided, inter alia, for substantive support for the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, its Scientific and Technical Subcommittee and its subsidiary bodies, training activities, international technical studies and space information services. Likewise, subsection B (4) (General legal services to United Nations organs

(The Chairman)

and programmes) of section 9 (Legal activities) provided for substantive support for the Legal Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, and its working groups and special working groups. Therefore, if the General Assembly approved draft resolution A/SPC/46/L.11, there would be no programme budget implications. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee wished to adopt the draft resolution without a vote.

55. Draft resolution A/SPC/46/L.11 was adopted without a vote.

56. The PRESIDENT said that the Committee had thus concluded its consideration of agenda item 71.

The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.