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SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE
40th meeting
held on
Monday, 26 November 1984
at 10.30 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 40th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. DIALLO (Guinea)

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(continued):

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- (b) IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SECOND UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE EXPLORATION AND PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.55 a.m.

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

- (a) REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE (continued)
(A/39/20)
- (b) IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SECOND UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE EXPLORATION AND PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (continued) (A/39/515)

1. Mr. CANALES MARQUEZ (Chile) said that outer space activities must be conducted in accordance with the relevant instruments of international law. Outer space belonged to all mankind and should be used to promote the welfare of all countries, particularly developing countries. Outer space technology provided new ways of improving the living conditions of the most disadvantaged countries. In that regard, he stressed the right of all countries to have prior access to information on their territories obtained through remote sensing. Countries whose territory was sensed had the right to set prices for such information and to be compensated for its use. In that regard, he reiterated his country's proposal for the establishment of an international agency or world authority which would administer natural resources in an equitable manner and for the benefit of the sensed States.

2. He emphasized the need to bring about the speedy regulation of nuclear power sources in outer space and supported the proposal made by the representative of Sweden calling for a moratorium on the use of such power sources. It was crucially important to take steps to avert possible catastrophes resulting from the use of those power sources. With regard to the geostationary orbit, his delegation stressed the need for legal norms in order to eliminate the contradictions which had arisen between the rules laid down by the International Telecommunication Union and the relevant provisions of the Outer Space Treaty of 1967. It was urgently necessary to ensure the equitable use of the geostationary orbit with due account taken of the interests and needs of the developing countries. The speedy delimitation of outer space was urgently required in order to bring about a legal framework governing activities in that area. The growing militarization of outer space represented a threat to the future of mankind. Legal and political mechanisms must be set up in order to avert the possibility of armed conflict in outer space. A survey by the Secretary-General of the views of Member States on that important question and on the means for making outer space an area of peace and co-operation in accordance with international law would be a first step in that direction.

3. In order to meet the political, legal and scientific challenges arising out of space technology, joint efforts and co-operation among the countries of Latin America were vitally important. It was a question of identifying the means for obtaining jointly the maximum benefits from space technology in order to bring about the economic and social development of the region as a whole. Consideration

(Mr. Canales Marquez, Chile)

might be given to activities such as a massive literacy campaign conducted by satellite and technical information programmes for rural areas.

4. The militarization of outer space and the over-commercialization of outer space activities would only widen the existing gap between rich and poor countries. Chile was ready to search actively for solutions on the basis of consensus and constructive dialogue. The developing countries must not be expected to make all the concessions and assume all the burdens. A false consensus arising from intransigence and the perpetuation of injustices was totally unacceptable.

5. Mr. MARIN BOSCH (Mexico) said that the difficulty of implementing the recommendations of the Second United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNISPACE 82) had become evident in recent years. The problems caused by lack of financial and other resources and the slow pace of the work carried out by the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) had given rise to a certain amount of pessimism in that regard. For that reason, his delegation would support any constructive initiative designed to improve the functioning of the two Sub-Committees, particularly the Scientific and Technical Sub-Committee. He expressed concern at the fact that no significant progress had been made by the Working Group set up by the Legal Sub-Committee to consider the matters relating to the definition and delimitation of outer space and to the character and utilization of the geostationary orbit. The recent announcement by the United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) concerning its policy on the commercial use of outer space and the effects which that policy might have on the future participation of developing countries in the use of outer space were cause for further concern.

6. COPUOS could be justly proud of the many legal instruments which it had elaborated in order to lay down guidelines for the peaceful uses of outer space. Unfortunately, those instruments had not stopped the militarization of outer space. It was currently estimated, for example, that 75 per cent of the satellites in outer space had some military application. Furthermore, anti-satellite weapons were being tested, and the possibility of setting up a system of defence against ballistic missiles in outer space was being considered. For that reason, General Assembly resolution 38/80 had called upon all States, in particular those with major space capabilities, to undertake prompt negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations with a view to reaching agreement to halt the militarization of outer space and to prevent an arms race in outer space.

7. With regard to the work of COPUOS, he stressed the need to strengthen the spirit of international co-operation in order to ensure the use of outer space exclusively for peaceful purposes. His delegation felt that the States with major space capabilities were responsible for the weakening of that spirit of co-operation and for the extension of the arms race to outer space.

8. The two super-Powers had recently stated their intention to undertake new negotiations in order to reach agreement on a wide range of questions concerning nuclear and space weapons. The prevention of an arms race in outer space was one of the many questions which should be considered. He hoped that those negotiations would serve to overcome the current impasse in the Conference on Disarmament.

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(Mr. Marin Bosch, Mexico)

There had recently been talk of the need for each side to adopt "restraint measures". In that regard, he referred to the conclusions in the report of the Secretary-General on unilateral nuclear disarmament measures (A/39/516). The group of governmental experts had concluded, inter alia, that the process of negotiation must be resumed and revitalized and that interacting unilateral measures of restraint and de-escalation in the nuclear field could make a positive contribution to that end.

9. Mr. PHAM NGAC (Viet Nam) said that, in spite of the efforts of the international community to ensure the use of outer space for peaceful purposes, the militarization of outer space by certain warlike circles was becoming a serious threat to international peace and security and the very existence of mankind. The "Star Wars" plan of the Reagan Administration would only bring the world closer to the brink of a nuclear catastrophe and further impede efforts to promote international co-operation in the exploration and peaceful uses of outer space. Such a plan would also be in violation of a number of existing disarmament treaties and would set a dangerous precedent with regard to the observance of other important international agreements.

10. Viet Nam consistently condemned the policy of extending the arms race to outer space and, along with the other States participating in the INTERCOSMOS programme, had called for urgent measures to prevent the militarization of outer space. It was the obligation of all States to ensure the use of outer space exclusively for peaceful purposes. All efforts to halt the militarization of outer space and the extension of the arms race to outer space should be encouraged. His delegation, therefore, supported the initiatives put forward by the Soviet Union in that regard and greatly appreciated the unilateral commitment undertaken by the Soviet Union not to be the first to put anti-satellite weapons in outer space provided that other States also refrained from doing so. He urged other countries to follow that example and to undertake negotiations to prevent the extension of the arms race to outer space.

11. His Government reiterated its full support for the proposal put forward by India expressing the position of the Group of 77 at the twenty-seventh session of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. Viet Nam shared the view that COPUOS was competent to consider questions relating to the militarization of outer space and felt that it should be given a more specific mandate in that regard. The prevention of the militarization of outer space and the peaceful uses of outer space were closely connected. It was regrettable that a certain number of Member States, in the hope of gaining military superiority, sought to prevent the holding of negotiations on that subject both within and outside the United Nations.

12. His country attached great importance to the contribution of space research to economic, scientific and technical development. In view of the financial and technological gap between developed and developing countries, co-operation in space research was of particular importance for the latter. That was why his country was co-operating actively with other socialist countries and with United Nations bodies, whose assistance with training and in space research and applications was highly appreciated.

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(Mr. Pham Ngac, Viet Nam)

13. With the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization, Viet Nam had recently carried out a programme using data obtained by remote sensing for the evaluation of natural resources. Its results had found remarkable applications in many areas, but further assistance from the United Nations was needed to complete the programme.

14. His country also attached importance to space research and applications activities in regional organizations and had taken an active part in a regional programme of remote sensing under the auspices of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. He hoped that such co-operation would continue to be promoted in accordance with the recommendations of UNISPACE 82. In that context, his country welcomed the voluntary contributions and offers of assistance made by a number of Governments to help the developing countries.

15. Turning to legal questions, he said that discussion of the legal aspects of remote sensing and of the definition and delimitation of outer space had tested the will and patience of the international community for too long. His delegation was greatly concerned at the Legal Sub-Committee's failure to make more progress at its recent session. One of the barriers to final agreement on draft principles governing remote sensing activities was the question of a régime for the dissemination of data and information. In that regard, the Brazilian compromise proposal provided a good basis for negotiations. His delegation welcomed both the re-establishment of the Working Group on Remote Sensing and the proposal that the subject should be retained on the Legal Sub-Committee's agenda as a matter of priority. Greater efforts should be made to complete the drafting of acceptable principles which would safeguard the sovereign rights of States to their natural resources and prevent any possible misuse of remote sensing.

16. His delegation was also concerned at assertions that it was neither necessary nor appropriate to consider such questions as the definition and delimitation of outer space or the character and utilization of the geostationary orbit. His country believed that agreement on the former was urgently needed for many political, legal and practical reasons and that it should therefore be kept on the Legal Sub-Committee's agenda as a priority item. As for the geostationary orbit, his delegation believed that the Sub-Committee should continue to draw up general principles governing its rational and equitable use, taking due account of the interests of developing countries.

17. Mr. CANUTO (Observer for the Holy See) said that he wished to draw attention to recent activities dealing with outer space which the Holy See had sponsored in the hope of contributing to solving outstanding problems. After 27 years of space exploration, it could only be concluded that the gap between the haves and have-nots had widened. Many outer space topics had been tackled in various forums, but results had rarely matched expectations. Only a thorough, joint analysis of the many new problems posed by space could lead to success but it was too early to despair at the lack of obvious progress. Outer space presented a challenge to bring all nations and peoples together for the first time as equal partners.

18. In an effort to contribute to solving that problem, in October 1984, the Pontifical Academy of Sciences had organized a study week on the impact of space

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(Mr. Canuto, Observer, Holy See)

exploration on mankind, which had been attended by 13 countries and by representatives of various United Nations bodies and space satellite agencies. The three main topics discussed had been satellite communications, remote sensing and future uses of space.

19. On the subject of telecommunication satellites, participants had noted that their development was bound to be increasingly affected by non-technical issues. Since they could have considerable impact and might affect millions of people over large areas for long periods of time, those responsible for establishing satellite communication systems should be aware of their political and social responsibility, especially when the systems provided services not available by other means. In view of the potential impact of satellite communications on economic and social issues, further study was required to reach a better understanding of mankind's current and potential dependence on telecommunications in the economic and social spheres.

20. On the subject of remote sensing, participants in the study week had noted a need to develop new ways of adapting space technology to the varying requirements of societies in different parts of the world. Space technology alone could not solve the many problems which existed, especially if used in a form derived for the benefit of the rich. Space communications should not lead to uniformity and indoctrination but should reveal the world in all its rich variety. While the use of remote sensing was growing, so was concern amongst many countries as to whether the data it provided would be continuously available on an affordable and equitable basis, or whether vital information about their resources might not be accessible to them.

21. As for the future uses of space, participants in the study week had noted that the achievements already recorded had not contributed as much as they might to reducing poverty and illiteracy or to improving public health, food production and food security among the poorer nations of the world. Major efforts had to be made to try to ensure that the benefits of development were available to the vast numbers of the needy. Both nations and international organizations should encourage the establishment of regional machinery for co-operation in spreading those benefits.

22. In his address to the participants, Pope John Paul II had said that space must never be for the exclusive benefit of one nation or social group and that one of the biggest tasks that could be carried out with the help of communication satellites was the elimination of illiteracy. However, the rich countries must not attempt to use space technology to impose their own culture on poorer nations by a kind of cultural imperialism. Similarly, remote sensing could be of fundamental importance in the fight against hunger, provided that those who possessed the means of observing the world situation from outer space helped the poorer countries both to draw up and to carry out suitable programmes of economic development.

23. Participants in the study week and their hosts had tried to take a fresh look at the problems of outer space in a spirit of harmony, professionalism and deep concern. Man's growing capabilities in space could eventually lead to the creation of one global family which used the earth's resources for the common good of all.

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(Mr. Canuto, Observer, Holy See)

working towards that goal had become an important ethical imperative, since the alternative possibility was that much, if not the whole, of the human race might be wiped out.

24. Mr. RODRIGUEZ MEDINA (Colombia) proposed that document A/AC.198/73 of 13 April 1984 should be circulated to members of the Committee to assist them in their deliberations and that their attention should be drawn, in particular, to paragraphs 33 and 49 of that document.

25. The CHAIRMAN said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee approved the proposal.

26. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m.