UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FORTY-NINTH SESSION

Official Records

SPECIAL POLITICAL AND
DECOLONIZATION COMMITTEE
(FOURTH COMMITTEE)
20th meeting
held on
Thursday, 10 November 1994
at 10 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 20th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. HUDYMA (Ukraine)

CONTENTS

Distr. GENERAL
A/C.4/49/SR.20
2 December 1994
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: RUSSIAN

94-82139 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 76: INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE (continued) (A/49/20, A/49/280, A/49/381)

AGENDA ITEM 147: QUESTION OF THE REVIEW OF THE AGREEMENT GOVERNING THE ACTIVITIES OF STATES ON THE MOON AND OTHER CELESTIAL BODIES (continued) (A/49/141)

1. Mr. DUMITRIU (Romania) said that at the current time there truly were new prospects for expanding and enhancing international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space. In that respect, the United Nations and the Committee on the Peaceful uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) were playing a significant role; their work was not confined to routine matters or the mere codification of the existing practice of States. The efforts to create new legal structures and to extend to outer space principles of international law which, prior to the space era, had applied only to the activities of States on Earth, were a true exercise in preventive diplomacy.

2. In that spirit, his delegation had welcomed the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 47/68 of 14 December 1992 on the Principles Relevant to the Use of Nuclear Power Sources in Outer Space; despite their limitations, the Principles were the result of 12 years of hard work and consolidated the progress already achieved. Principles 8 and 9 relating to issues of responsibility and liability were of particular significance. It was important to ensure that those principles were put into practice and were strictly observed. At the same time, COPUOS and the Committee must carefully monitor future developments relating to nuclear power sources so that the relevant principles could be adapted and supplemented in good time, as required by such developments, or, if possible, in anticipation of such developments. It was not chronology which should determine the revision of the Principles, but the experience of their operation.

3. It should be noted that the anticipation of developments did not exclude pragmatism in legal, technical and scientific activities for the peaceful uses of outer space. It was in that spirit that his delegation had approached the report of COPUOS (A/49/20). It was clear from the report that problems which had already been on the agenda for a long time had still not been resolved in a manner that would be acceptable to all members of the Committee. First, there was the continuing dispute regarding the competence of the two United Nations bodies in the area of the prevention of an arms race in outer space. In the view of his delegation, that dispute could be resolved on the basis of General Assembly resolution 44/112 of 15 December 1989, paragraph 5 of which accorded an exclusive mandate to the Conference on Disarmament and its Ad Hoc Committee on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space.

4. Second, COPUOS had noted once again in its report that a variety of views had been expressed on the question of the definition and delimitation of outer space. Before drawing any conclusion, that question must be considered on the

basis of all available scientific and technical information which could be useful for making a determination about the need for strict delimitation. No attempt should be made to politicize the question. The specific consequences of such delimitation for the exploration and peaceful uses of outer space must be carefully studied.

5. On the problem of space debris, his delegation believed that the study of that question should be concerned with the consequences not only for the space environment but also for the Earth environment. It shared the view put forward in the report of COPUOS on its thirty-seventh session that COPUOS could make an important contribution in the area of environment and development by promoting international cooperation in the application of space technology for the purposes of environmental monitoring and sustainable development. That should be a priority objective in the cooperation between COPUOS, the Commission on Sustainable Development and other intergovernmental bodies of the United Nations concerned with the problems of environment and development.

6. Although it was not a space power, Romania took full advantage of the benefits of international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space and participated in that cooperation to the extent of its possibilities. The Romanian space agency supported the participation of Romanian scientists in international efforts to increase knowledge about outer space and the physical and chemical processes taking place there, and also about the biosphere and the Earth's crust. Romania was making increasing use of satellite telecommunications systems and meteorological satellites and was carrying out a large number of pilot projects on remote sensing in the areas of agriculture, geology, hydrology, environmental management and land use. In addition, through international cooperation, Romania was manufacturing magnetometers, mass spectrometers, dosimeters and instruments for studying cosmic radiation and for growing crystals under conditions of micro-gravity.

7. Cooperation with the International Telecommunications Satellite Organization (INTELSAT), the International Maritime Satellite Organization (INMARSAT) and the European Telecommunications Satellite Organization (EUTELSAT) was continuing to be beneficial, and had enabled Romania to begin to equip its ships with satellite navigational and telecommunications equipment, some of which was manufactured in Romania. Romania specialized in the construction of ground stations for the reception of data from meteorological satellites in polar and geostationary orbits. It also participated in programmes of the Council on International Cooperation in the Study and Utilization of Outer Space (INTERCOSMOS), and had recently concluded an agreement on cooperation with the European Space Agency which had already opened out new possibilities for the development of space research and industry in Romania and for integration in European structures. Romania was willing to provide a site for a regional training centre in space science and technology.

8. Mr. YAHYA (Malaysia) said that the Malaysian delegation recognized the valuable work of COPUOS and its contribution to the promotion of international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space. It believed that the exploration and utilization of outer space should be carried out for the benefit

of all States and should take into account the needs of the developing countries. It commended the decision of COPUOS to continue its consideration of ways and means of maintaining outer space for peaceful purposes.

9. The Malaysian delegation also supported the recommendation of COPUOS that its membership should be increased by no more than eight Member States. It disagreed with the recommendation and view of COPUOS about the procedure for the appointment of the new members. The decision on such appointments should be taken by the President of the General Assembly in consultation with the chairmen of the regional groups. The General Assembly had always followed such a practice, which was consistent with its rules of procedure concerning the establishment and working methods of its subsidiary organs.

10. The delegation of Malaysia fully supported the recommendation of COPUOS contained in paragraphs 147 to 149 of its report about the possibility of convening a third UNISPACE conference. Careful consideration of the organizational and substantive aspects would be vital to the success of the conference.

11. Mr. ABDULLAH (Indonesia) said that it was undeniable that the application of space science and technology were powerful tools for promoting global development, in particular the efforts of the developing countries to derive benefits for their national development programmes in the economic, social and cultural spheres. Yet it was also true that the developing countries lacked the essential infrastructure for the rapid introduction of new and advanced technologies. International cooperation in that realm had therefore become an imperative economic necessity.

12. It was most important for outer space to be used exclusively for peaceful purposes and for the benefit of all mankind, and regional cooperation offered unprecedented opportunities for attaining the goal of sustainable development. Such an approach could help to identify common problems, strengthen mutual understanding and facilitate the adoption of generally acceptable solutions. It was essential for the international community, as it embarked on new space programmes, to take all necessary measures to preserve and protect the environment of the planet.

13. The Indonesian delegation welcomed and endorsed the recommendation for the convening of a third UNISPACE conference in accordance with General Assembly resolution 48/39 of 10 December 1993. The working papers submitted by India, Pakistan and the Group of 77 merited further consideration and discussion. In its report COPUOS had recommended that a consensus should first be reached on the agenda, venue and funding of the conference. In that connection the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee should consider the various themes and subjects with a view to determining which goals and tasks would address the needs and interests of all States.

14. Many developing countries were very worried about the increasing commercialization of data acquired through remote-sensing activities. It was important to make available such analysed information at a reasonable cost and

in a timely manner. There was also a need to step up the efforts to ensure the continuity, compatibility and complementarity of systems for remote-sensing of the Earth. Similarly, there should be regular meetings of satellite and ground station operators and the users of the services.

15. The question of the definition and delimitation of outer space had evaded agreement for over three decades. The Indonesian delegation earnestly hoped that the issue would be resolved in the near future. Any precise legal framework which was established must be consistent with the basic principles of international law. In that regard it had taken note of the working paper introduced by the Working Group at its 1993 session. The paper provided a firm basis for future exchanges of views.

16. It must be acknowledged that the problems associated with the saturation of the geostationary orbit remained unresolved. Under the present circumstances the vast majority of States, particularly the developing countries, did not have equitable and safeguarded access to the orbit. Any definition and delimitation of outer space must necessarily include the establishment of a special legal regime for the geostationary orbit.

17. Mr. SAMADI (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the rapid developments in space technology and many of its applications had already made a great impact on the quality of life in many countries, and recent international developments had opened up new opportunities for the use of space technology to improve international peace and stability. The implementation of all the recommendations of UNISPACE 82 could play a major role in solving the problems of Member States and in particular of the developing countries. The Islamic Republic of Iran endorsed the recommendation of COPUOS concerning the development of national capabilities and the initiatives taken by the United Nations Programme on Space Applications to establish regional centres for space science and technology education. It reiterated its readiness to host the Asian centre for space science and technology education, for which adequate financial resources had been allocated and teaching staff selected. The Iranian delegation was also pleased to note the agreement reached by COPUOS on the convening of a third UNISPACE conference in the near future. The holding of the conference, especially in a developing country, would create an opportunity for a large number of States to take part in the consideration of the achievements of space technology and its applications since UNISPACE 82.

18. The Iranian delegation was also pleased to note the progress made in the consideration of the important subject of space debris and supported the view of COPUOS that the Subcommittee should continue to develop a firm scientific and technical basis for future actions to tackle what was a very urgent problem. Another important issue was the prevention of an arms race in outer space. There was an urgent need to conclude an international agreement or agreements on the prevention of an arms race in outer space, with a view to strengthening the existing regime, and also to develop confidence-building measures in the interim. In that context the Iranian delegation supported the idea of enhanced cooperation between COPUOS and the Conference on Disarmament. The Scientific and Technical Subcommittee should also consider the question of creating a

unified mechanism through which all countries could cooperate with regard to remote sensing and the use of remote-sensing data.

19. Mr. STRAUSS (Canada) said that the most important event in Canada over the past year had undoubtedly been the approval of a new space programme by the Government. The programme had built on existing activities while providing for new initiatives, and over $2.7 billion would be allocated in the federal budget over the coming decade for civilian space activities. The programme met the following key objectives of the Government in relation to space activities: first, it focused on consolidating Canada's commercial and technical strength to meet national needs in the areas of Earth observation and communications; second, it would contribute to economic growth and employment; third, it would help to increase industrial competitiveness on world markets; and, fourth, it would ensure maximum leverage of resources through private sector investment.

20. The new Canadian space programme provided for significant investments in fields such as Earth observation, satellite communications, space science and space technology. It included new resources for additional flight opportunities to allow Canadian astronauts to participate fully in the in-orbit assembly of space stations and experiments on behalf of the Canadian scientific and industrial communities. It also provided for investments in a Space Awareness Programme. International cooperation had always been the cornerstone of Canadian space activities, particularly in the fields of space science, space technology development, and space and ground infrastructures for Earth observation. Canada was pleased that the Russian Federation would be participating fully in the project to build the International Space Station.

21. Among the most significant achievements in space activities in Canada over the past year, he highlighted space science and global change research, in the context of which Canada was continuing to develop an instrument for measuring pollution in the troposphere. A recent discovery made by the Wind Imaging Interferometer had demonstrated that the upper atmosphere responded to processes arising at the Earth's surface. The instrument had also discovered a gap in atomic oxygen at the equator, thought to be due to the action of atmospheric tides and associated winds. Furthermore, in July, Canadian scientists had participated in the second International Microgravity Laboratory mission, the results of which would be useful in understanding the causes of back pain in astronauts. Progress had also been made in Canada's two largest projects, the development of a mobile servicing system for assembling, maintaining and operating the International Space Station, and the launch of the RADARSAT satellite which would permit observation of the Earth even in darkness and through clouds. A satellite search and rescue system which Canada had helped to pioneer had already saved over 3,500 lives.

22. His delegation hoped that 1995 would be a productive year for the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) and its subcommittees. Canada was particularly pleased that COPUOS had decided to address actively the issue of space debris, and it looked forward to productive discussions on a number of other issues, including the use and application of space technology in education and sustainable development, and ways and means to improve the effectiveness of

the work methods of COPUOS and its subcommittees. In recent years a convergence of factors such as the end of the cold war and enhanced global awareness of the importance of environmental protection and disaster prevention had made international cooperation in space activities even more essential. One manifestation of that cooperation was the Ministerial Conference on Space Applications for Development in Asia and the Pacific, which had been held in Beijing in September 1994. Those and other events would make it possible to realize the full benefits from investment in space activities.

23. Mr. HELLBECK (Germany), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that in recent years the role of multilateral, bilateral and regional cooperation in the fields of space science and technology had grown considerably. Such expanded cooperation was symbolized by the International Space Station, a project in which the Russian Federation would join the former cooperation partners - the United States, Canada, Japan and the European Space Agency. Another important step on the way to establishing truly global space cooperation had been the participation of the German astronaut Ulf Merbold in the work of the Russian orbital space station Mir.

24. Looking back at the activities undertaken the previous year by the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, he stressed the importance of the initial discussions in the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee on the question of space debris. Finding a solution to that problem was particularly important for the safety of future space flights, and his delegation recommended that COPUOS should set a deadline for the submission of a report by the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee.

25. The European Union also attached great importance to the use of space in safeguarding the environment. COPUOS could play a significant role in the application of a number of the recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. Moreover, the planned third United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space should be meaningful for all participants, regardless of what group of States they belonged to. The European Union therefore welcomed the recommendation by COPUOS that the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee should conduct a very thorough analysis and definition of an agenda for that Conference at its next session. It should also consider whether the goals set for such a Conference might possibly be achieved by other means, including intensification of work within COPUOS.

26. On the question of enlarging the membership of COPUOS, the formula that had been agreed in the Committee took into account the very different points of view of the various regional groups and struck a balance between them. The European Union would prefer COPUOS membership to be extended only to those countries which were already actively involved in international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space and could therefore contribute substantively to the Committee's work. It was sure that consensus would shortly be reached on all eight candidates, but, should that process take longer than expected, there might be a case for considering the admission of States that already had the backing of their regional groups.

27. Mr. INDERFURTH (United States of America) said that the current session of the General Assembly was being held on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the first lunar landing, under his country's Apollo 11 programme. Later, in 1973, with the participation of 28 other States, the Skylab space station had been put into orbit and had produced an unprecedented wealth of useful scientific data. In 1975, the Apollo-Soyuz Test Project, the first American-Soviet space flight, had shown the world that opposing super-Powers could participate together in space exploration. In recent years, unprecedented political changes had taken place and had furthered international cooperation in space exploration to the benefit of all countries. Attention was now focused on the application of space techniques to the understanding and solution of terrestrial problems, while, at the same time, exploration of the solar system was continuing under joint international programmes to discover the origin of the universe and of life itself. His delegation had drawn attention to the twenty-fifth anniversary of the lunar landing in order to point out that the Apollo 11 lunar mission had affirmed one of the cardinal principles of the 1967 Treaty, namely that the exploration of outer space should be carried out for the benefit and in the interests of all States.

28. A clear example of how national space programmes could provide global benefits was to be noted in the area of satellite remote sensing. For over 30 years, the United States had been operating satellite systems for that purpose. On 5 May 1994, the United States Government had decided to merge two meteorological satellite systems operated by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Department of Defense. The scientific data obtained by that system would be distributed worldwide. On the same day, the President of the United States had signed the Land Remote Sensing Strategy to maintain the continuity of Landsat data. Under that plan, NOAA, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the Department of the Interior would ensure that the satellite data were available to users throughout the world.

29. In the view of his country, another potential area for international cooperation was the detection and tracking of asteroids and comets in Earth-crossing orbits. NASA estimated that there were currently 2,000 comets or asteroids capable of causing major global damage. His delegation believed that the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space could play a key role on that issue.

30. The success of the Committee's work and the cooperative spirit which it displayed demonstrated that the principle of consensus could work effectively. It would be recalled that his delegation and others had put forward detailed proposals over the previous decade for improving the work of the Committee and its subcommittees. The Committee had concluded that the strengthening of international cooperation in the peaceful exploration and use of outer space implied the need for an improvement in the methods and forms of its work. It was gratifying that many of those proposals had been adopted. Of particular note had been the productive discussions in the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee, in which space scientists and experts were playing a central role. On the other hand, more remained to be done to improve the working methods of

the Legal Subcommittee. In that connection, he was glad to note that the Chairman of that Subcommittee intended to conduct informal consultations on its methods of work and agenda and to report the results to the Committee at its 1995 session.

31. Mr. VERDIER (Argentina) said that his delegation wished to raise a number of issues that deserved particular attention. At its recent session, the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee had, inter alia, considered the question of the implementation of the recommendations of the Second United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. In that context, Argentina noted the proposal to hold a third UNISPACE Conference. It supported the action taken under the United Nations Programme on Space Applications and, in that connection, welcomed the measures relating to the establishment in Brazil of a Centre for Space Science and Technology Education and was prepared to cooperate fully in its work. His delegation was gratified that a decision had been taken that the question of space debris would be considered by the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee.

32. With regard to the work of the Legal Subcommittee, he noted, in particular, its discussions on the question of the delimitation of outer space on the basis of the innovative proposal put forward by the Russian Federation concerning the development of a questionnaire on aerospace objects. His delegation hoped that, at its next session, the Subcommittee would begin to prepare the text of that questionnaire. With respect to the geostationary orbit, he took note of the working paper on that matter submitted by the delegation of Colombia (A/AC.105/C.2/L.192), the underlying theme of which was equitable access to that orbit. The members of the Subcommittee had considered 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 of all States. Discussion of that matter had been based on a working paper (A/AC.105/C.2/L.182/Rev.1), of which his delegation had been a sponsor.

33. Argentina welcomed the decision to enlarge the membership of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and was confident that Nicaragua, Cuba and Peru, as new members of the Committee representing Latin America and the Caribbean, would make a major contribution to its work.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

34. The CHAIRMAN said that the delegations concerned had apparently not yet completed their consultations on agenda items 76 and 147; in order to facilitate the work of the Committee, he suggested that the deadline for the submission of draft proposals should be 12 noon on Friday, 11 November. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee agreed to that suggestion.

35. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 11.45 a.m.