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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 16th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. HOLOHAN (Ireland)
(Vice-Chairman)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.30 p.m.

TRIBUTE TO THE MEMORY OF YITZHAK RABIN, PRIME MINISTER OF ISRAEL

1. At the invitation of the Chairman, the members of the Committee observed a minute's silence.

AGENDA ITEM 83: INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE (A/50/20 and A/50/384)

2. The CHAIRMAN said that through the promotion of international cooperation in space activities the Committee contributed significantly to the achievement of the major objectives of the United Nations: international peace and economic and social development. The rapid expansion over the previous few years of national, bilateral and multilateral space activities had led to a further recognition of the opportunities for strengthening friendly relations among States through space activities and of the fact that space technology was indispensable for improving life on earth. Space activities should therefore be conducted in accordance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations. The Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) and its subsidiary bodies, the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee and the Legal Subcommittee, had continued to fulfil their responsibility to ensure that space was utilized in conformity with international law, for peaceful purposes and for the benefit of all countries.

3. Speaking at a time when the second joint United States Space Shuttle and the Russian Federation Mir Space Station mission was in progress, he noted the significant expansion of international cooperation in space activities. The world's grave concern for the global environment, too, had led to new cooperative efforts to observe the Earth from space. As well as deepening mutual understanding among participating nations, the appropriate use of space technology could also make substantial contributions to economic and social development. Remote-sensing technology provided essential data not only for the protection of the global environment but also for disaster warning and prevention. Rapidly developing space-based communications technology facilitated the exchange of ideas and information on a global scale, thus aiding the development of democracy.

4. Since 1958, when it had been set up, the work of COPUOS, which had established the legal regime for space activities, comprising five international treaties and four sets of principles, had evolved in response to the changing political and economic environment and to the rapid technological development of the past decades. He was confident that it would continue to respond to the demands and expectations of the international community.

5. Mr. HOHENFELLNER (Chairman, Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space), introducing the report of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (A/50/20) said that a video conference between the Secretary-General and the astronauts and cosmonauts taking part in the second joint docking mission between the Mir Space Station and the Space Shuttle, scheduled as part of the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the United Nations, was indicative of the

importance of international cooperation in outer space, the contribution of the United Nations in promoting such cooperation and the way such activities promoted international cooperation on the Earth.

6. The importance of international cooperation in space activities could not be overemphasized. While reducing costs for spacefaring nations, it also opened the door to space for nations without space capability. It could also be a key to the future prosperity of developing countries and to solving some global problems. No nation alone had the resources available to gather data on the entire Earth. COPUOS was committed to the maintenance of international security and the promotion of economic and social progress and development by further encouraging space activities for peaceful purposes. In that connection he expressed his gratitude to the Chairman of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee, Professor John Carver of Australia, who had indicated his intention to retire after 25 years of distinguished service to the United Nations and the international community.

7. The Committee's work had covered the following main areas: ways and means of maintaining outer space for peaceful purposes; the report of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee on the work of its thirty-second session (A/AC.105/605); the report of the Legal Subcommittee on the work of its thirty-fourth session (A/AC.105/607); and a review of the spin-off benefits of space technology. It had also discussed the convening of a third United Nations conference on the exploration and the peaceful uses of outer space.

8. During the joint consideration of the report of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee on the implementation of the recommendations of UNISPACE 82, COPUOS had dealt with such important matters as the United Nations Programme on Space Applications and the coordination of space activities within the United Nations system, remote sensing of the Earth by satellites and use of nuclear power sources in outer space. It had also considered the subject of space debris, for the first time as a priority agenda item of the Subcommittee. The Working Group of the Whole had been reconvened and had concluded that while some progress had been made on implementing the recommendations of UNISPACE 82 much remained to be done. It had made precise recommendations, identifying four priority areas where further efforts should be made to promote the application of space science and technology for development.

9. The first related to the stimulation and support of the growth of indigenous nuclei and an autonomous technological base in space technology in developing countries. There were still many obstacles to implementing the recommendation of UNISPACE 82 that there should be free exchange of scientific and technological information; greater international efforts were needed to eliminate those obstacles. The Working Group had also reiterated that appropriate assistance should be given, particularly from international financial agencies, to support demonstration projects to provide actual experience in space applications for developing countries. The same applied to the United Nations own Programme on Space Applications: the Organization's current financial crisis had affected some of the activities of the Programme, although they had been endorsed by the Committee and subsequently by the General Assembly. The Working Group was grateful to Member States and international organizations that had supported the Programme in the form of cash and in-kind

contributions for its activities. Other States and organizations had been urged to make similar contributions.

10. COPUOS had recognized the importance of ongoing international efforts to ensure the continuity, compatibility and complementarity of remote-sensing systems. Equally important was the promotion of cooperation through regular meetings between satellite operators, ground-station operators and users. With regard to the use of nuclear power sources in outer space, COPUOS had endorsed the recommendation of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee that revision of the Principles Relevant to the Use of Nuclear Power Sources in Outer Space was currently not warranted. It had also agreed with the Subcommittee that Member States should continue to be invited to report to the Secretary-General on a regular basis with regard to national and international research concerning the safety of space objects with nuclear power sources.

11. COPUOS had also agreed that further studies should be conducted on the issue of the collision of space debris with orbiting space objects having nuclear power sources on board. It was important to have a firm scientific and technical basis for future action on the complex attributes of space debris. It had also endorsed the Subcommittee's plans for future consideration of space debris: in 1996 it would consider measurements of space debris, understanding of data and the effects of that environment on space systems; in 1997 the modelling of the space debris environment and risk assessment; and in 1998 space debris mitigation measures.

12. Other agenda items of the Subcommittee had included the examination of the physical nature and technical attributes of the geostationary orbit; matters relating to life sciences, including space medicine; progress in the geosphere-biosphere (global change) programme; matters relating to planetary exploration; and matters relating to astronomy.

13. The Subcommittee had considered the theme it had chosen for special attention at its 1995 session, namely the application of space technology to education, with particular emphasis on its use in developing countries, and on behalf of COPUOS he wished to thank the Committee on Space Research of the International Council of Scientific Unions (COSPAR) and the International Astronautical Federation (IAF) for their continued support of the Subcommittee's work. The theme chosen for special attention at the Subcommittee's 1996 session was the utilization of micro and small satellites for the expansion of low-cost space activities, taking into account the special needs of developing countries. COPUOS had once again endorsed the Subcommittee's recommendation that COSPAR and IAF, along with Member States, should be invited to organize a symposium to complement the discussions on the special theme. The Subcommittee also considered matters relating to the convening of a third UNISPACE conference.

14. The Legal Subcommittee at its thirty-fourth session had considered the early review and possible revision of the Principles Relevant to the Use of Nuclear Power Sources in Outer Space. COPUOS had agreed that before any revision was undertaken the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee should consider the need for it in the light of changing technology, and had noted that the Legal Subcommittee's view was that at the present time revision was not warranted. COPUOS had endorsed the Legal Subcommittee's recommendation that

consideration of the item relating to the early review and possible revision of the Principles by its Working Group should again be suspended for one year pending the results of the work in the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee. It had also endorsed the Legal Subcommittee's recommendation that the item concerning nuclear power sources be retained on the agenda of the Legal Subcommittee.

15. The Working Group on the definition and delimitation of outer space and the character and utilization of the geostationary orbit had finalized the text of the "draft questionnaire concerning aerospace objects", and had agreed that its purpose was to seek the preliminary views of Member States; COPUOS had agreed that the replies to the questionnaire could provide a basis for the Legal Subcommittee to decide how it might continue its consideration of the agenda item. The Working Group had also reviewed the working paper on the geostationary satellite orbit introduced at the 1993 session, and COPUOS had noted that the exchange of views on it had been productive and that its sponsor intended to submit a revised version at the 1996 session of the Legal Subcommittee.

16. Substantive progress had been made in discussions regarding outer space benefits in the Legal Subcommittee and its Working Group. In addition to the revised working paper entitled "Principles regarding international cooperation in the exploration and utilization of outer space for peaceful purposes", jointly submitted by 11 Member States, the Working Group had before it a working paper entitled "Declaration on international cooperation in the exploration and use of outer space for the benefit and in the interests of all States, taking into particular account the needs of developing countries", jointly submitted by two Member States. The exchange of views between the working papers' co-sponsors had expanded the terms of reference of the debate. The Chairman of the Working Group had produced an informal working paper merging the texts of the two working papers.

17. The Chairman of the Legal Subcommittee had also conducted informal, open-ended consultations with all its members on its working methods and agenda.

18. COPUOS had continued its consideration of the current status of the spin-off benefits of space technology and had agreed that they were yielding substantial practical benefits in a wide variety of fields related to industrial measurement and control, image and data processing, medicine, computer systems, robotics, power generation, special materials and chemicals, water treatment, public safety, consumer goods, manufacturing and refrigeration. COPUOS had agreed that a dialogue and exchange of experience could assist all countries in applying space technologies to solve common problems, and that there was a need to examine ways of strengthening and enhancing such international cooperation by improving the access of all countries to such spin-off benefits, particularly those by which the social and economic needs of developing countries could be addressed. COPUOS had welcomed the fact that the United Nations Programme on Space Applications planned to hold in 1996 the United Nations/United States International Workshop on Spin-off Benefits of Space Technology: Challenges and Opportunities.

19. COPUOS had also discussed matters related to the convening of a third UNISPACE conference, and had considered the results of discussions in the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee, which had conducted its work through its Working Group of the Whole. At its 1995 session, the Working Group had established an informal open-ended drafting group to prepare a report on the matter, reflecting its deliberations on political and technological developments since UNISPACE 82, the objectives and organization of a third UNISPACE conference, other means to achieve the goals set for the conference, and other ideas presented by delegations. The drafting group's work had resulted in an indicative agenda for a third UNISPACE conference. COPUOS had agreed that such a conference could be held before the turn of the century and had requested the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee to continue its work with a view to completing at its 1996 session the development of a framework that would allow the Committee to evaluate proposals in June 1996; the framework should consider the objectives in order to define a detailed agenda. COPUOS had agreed that on the basis of discussions to take place in the Subcommittee it should at its 1996 session consider all issues regarding the possible holding of a third UNISPACE conference. It had also agreed to consider whether the objectives of such a conference could be achieved by other means, with a view to making a final decision on the matter in 1996.

20. COPUOS had extensive and productive discussions on issues related to its working methods and those of its subsidiary bodies. It had established a Working Group of the Whole which had taken into account the results and recommendations of the informal consultations conducted by the Chairman of the Legal Subcommittee. Discussions had focused on the length and schedule of the session, the list of agenda items, the allocation of time and timing for the consideration of each agenda item, the general exchange of views and the structure of the Committee's report. COPUOS had agreed that statements during the general exchange of views need not contain information on national space activities nor should they deal with items covered elsewhere in the agenda, that the Committee should develop a long-term work plan that would balance the need to rationalize the use of resources and maximize its output and that of its subsidiary bodies, and that the Committee and its subsidiary bodies should periodically review the items on their respective agendas to determine the advisability of continuing consideration of such items.

21. COPUOS and its subsidiary bodies were making greater efforts to increase efficiency by reducing the unnecessary time and costs involved in the current manner of conducting discussions. In response to the request by the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences contained in General Assembly resolutions 48/222 B and 49/221 B, COPUOS had reviewed the need for its verbatim records, and had recommended a new approach, namely to have unedited transcripts of its sessions in lieu of verbatim records, starting with its 1996 session. The Committee on Conferences had noted with interest that decision, which would result in very considerable savings, and had requested COPUOS to keep the General Assembly informed of its experience with its unedited transcripts so that the General Assembly could draw on that experience for the future.

22. In light of the retirement of Professor John Carver of Australia as Chairman of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee, COPUOS had noted that Germany had officially nominated Professor Dietrich Rex as a candidate and had

expressed its hope that the new Chairman of the Subcommittee would be elected by consensus at its session in February 1996.

23. During the year COPUOS had welcomed Cuba, Peru, Kazakstan, Malaysia, Nicaragua, Republic of Korea, Senegal and South Africa as new members; Cuba and the Republic of Korea would rotate every two years, as of 1 January 1995, with Peru and Malaysia respectively.

24. The spirit of compromise and cooperation in the work of COPUOS was stronger than ever, and the only way to ensure its continued effectiveness was to maintain the principle of consensus. With the ending of the cold war, cooperation and compromise between the developed and developing countries had become a very important factor in deciding the course of discussions within COPUOS. There was an increasing use of space technology in the daily life of an increasing number of countries, and present achievements were but a modest indication of what space technology could do in the future to improve the human condition. COPUOS looked to the Special Political and Decolonization Committee for input regarding how it might better achieve the goal of ensuring that all space activities were carried out in the interest of all countries and for exclusively peaceful purposes.

25. Mr. PÉREZ-GRIFFO (Spain), speaking on behalf of the European Union, Malta and Romania, said that the opportunities offered by the application of new space technologies in various scientific and technical fields and by teledetection in general should be seized unhesitatingly. The Scientific and Technical Subcommittee's decision to address the practical issues of space debris and the use of micro-satellites during its next session was welcome. On the other hand, their delegations were not convinced that more intensive discussions within COPUOS would not obviate the need for a third UNISPACE conference.

26. The European Union believed that it was time for the Legal Subcommittee to focus on areas, such as spin-off benefits of space technology, where consensus was feasible, setting aside fruitless discussion of the delimitation of space and the physical nature and technical attributes of the geostationary orbit, which had failed to produce agreement in more than 30 years of debate. Should the latter items remain on the Subcommittee's agenda, they should be discussed only biannually. COPUOS as well should seriously reform its working methods and adapt the duration of its sessions to technological developments and changes in the world.

27. Mr. GUIBILA (Burkina Faso) said that the exploration and use of outer space should be for the benefit and in the interest of all States, taking into account particularly the needs and geographical position of the developing countries, so that they had access to space resources and techniques and the benefits of space activities. The General Assembly had discussed international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space every year since 1958, and had convened two conferences on the subject. Thirteen years after the second such conference, achievements still fell very far short of expectations, notably regarding the decision to establish regional centres for space science and technology education. Such permanent structures could contribute to enhancing technical and research capability, as well as space infrastructures. Regional centres could improve the ability of developing countries to process information by

satellite and to build up a data archive and would enable those countries to participate more effectively in world-wide activities to protect the environment and ensure sustainable development in accordance with Agenda 21. There was a need to mobilize all necessary resources to finance the activities of the UNISPACE 82 programme, particularly the establishment of regional centres for space science and technology education. His delegation invited international financial institutions and the United Nations, as well as the countries of the North, to make a financial contribution to a special fund that could be set up for that purpose. If outer space were to be legally defined as the common heritage of mankind, it would be entirely appropriate if the telecommunications and space industries were required to contribute to such a fund.

28. The exploration and peaceful uses of outer space brought unimaginable benefits in terms of development. Some space activities, especially of an environmental nature, transcended purely national interests, which was why his delegation called for greater cooperation between countries. Remote-sensing data and processed information should be made freely available to all countries, particularly the developing countries, at a reasonable cost and in a timely manner. Remote-sensing by satellite was very effective in monitoring the environment, planning sustainable development, exploiting water resources, monitoring crops and predicting and assessing natural disasters.

29. With regard to meteorology, the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP) had satellite studies at its disposal, but access by the developing countries was very limited because of their financial difficulties; since all the developing countries were among the most vulnerable when it came to the effects of climate change on their economies and populations, it was a matter of great urgency to reduce the cost of using IGBP data.

30. With regard to telecommunications, promoting the dissemination of information by audiovisual and computer methods was an effective contribution to the economic, social and cultural development of States, but investments in telecommunications were very costly and appeared to be something of a luxury for many States a large number of which had vast rural and even urban areas that were deprived of radio services, let alone television.

31. It was pointless to carry on talking about development until the conditions and mechanisms had been created to enable all countries, and particularly the developing countries, to acquire genuine development tools like space technologies and space sciences. That was why it was essential to integrate the developing countries into the world network of space science and technology in the long term; in the short term, consideration should be given to their acquiring and utilizing micro-satellites at minimum cost.

32. Mr. AHAMED (India) reviewed the advances made in his Government's space programme, including the forthcoming launching of two state-of-the-art satellites into geostationary orbit - the INSAT-2C to be used largely for telecommunications and the IRS-1C for remote-sensing with environmental, agricultural and resource-management applications. He drew attention to the 1996 launching of the IRS-P3 monitoring satellite for use in astronomy and the scanning of plant life. India's space programme aimed to further the social and economic development of the country while sharing know-how with other developing

countries, and it emphasized cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space with other leading space agencies. In addition, an agreement had just been concluded establishing in India, at United Nations behest, the Centre for Space Science and Technology Education in Asia and the Pacific Region. The Centre was expected to grow into a United Nations-affiliated cooperative network that would fully utilize the resources and potential of the States of the region and would be open to all of them.

33. COPUOS had in the past year moved ahead with the planning for a third United Nations conference on outer space by the end of the century, and, together with the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee, it should keep that important item on its agenda. The approach the two bodies had taken to the item relating to space debris was also encouraging.

34. Mr. MAZILU (Romania) said that the priority for COPUOS was to take the lead in ensuring that outer space continued to be used for exclusively peaceful purposes. That would entail the further development of international space law, including the preparation of agreements on various practical peaceful applications of space science and technology, such as the dual use of military satellites and non-discriminatory access to information thus obtained. The scientific and technical dimension of its work should be expanded and global cooperation promoted in areas like disaster warning and mitigation and search-and-rescue activities.

35. Some of the recommendations of the Second United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space had yet to be fully implemented, and there the planned activities of the United Nations Programme on Space Applications for 1995 and 1996 would be useful, as would the United Nations workshops, training courses and seminars and the regional centres for space science and technology education. Romania itself was working towards the early establishment of such a regional centre.

36. The Scientific and Technical Subcommittee could do much to encourage the application of new space technologies to areas such as telecommunications, climate and pollution monitoring, resource management and teledetection. It had made a wise decision to address the issues of space debris and the use of micro-satellites and should give priority to developing further affordable strategies to minimize the potential impact of space debris.

37. As to the work of the Legal Subcommittee, its review and possible revision of the Principles Relevant to the Use of Nuclear Power Sources in Outer Space should depend upon the position taken by the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee regarding the need for such revision in the light of changing technology. The Legal Subcommittee, on the other hand, had had a fruitful exchange of views on 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. All countries should have access to outer space activities and benefit from them, as a legal right, and the Subcommittee should address existing inequalities between technologically advanced and developing countries, emphasizing the need to develop indigenous space capabilities. COPUOS and the Legal Subcommittee should focus their

discussions on profitable subjects such as the spin-off benefits of space technology, which had ramifications in so many fields. States should cooperate in the efficient allocation of resources and in the exploration and use of outer space on an equitable and mutually acceptable basis.

38. Romania believed that a third United Nations conference on outer space could be convened in the near future, after a consensus on its agenda, venue and funding.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.