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Chairman: Mr. KITTIKHOUN (Lao People's
Democratic Republic)

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AGENDA ITEM 83: INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 83: INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE
(A/51/20, A/51/276)

1. The CHAIRMAN said that the promotion of international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space continued to be an important task of the Organization. Such cooperation would not only strengthen the friendly relations among countries but also provide opportunities for further economic and social development at the global level.

2. Since 1958, when the United Nations had first addressed the issue of outer space, the sphere of space activities had rapidly expanded, involving a great many nations and international organizations. However, the United Nations continued to be the only forum for all Member States and, more importantly, the only body which could ensure that the space activities of Member States were conducted in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Organization. It could also lead international efforts to expand the uses of outer space to achieve the collective goals of the international community, such as those identified at the recent series of United Nations conferences.

3. In recent years there had been an expansion of international cooperation in space activities. The Russian Federation and the United States of America had continued to invite astronauts and cosmonauts from other countries on board their "Mir" space station and space shuttles. International cooperation was also a key element in protecting the Earth. Since 1992, which had been celebrated as "International Space Year", a growing number of countries had participated in the observation of Earth from outer space, proving that space technology could be an essential tool for the protection of the global environment. There had also been an increasing use of space technology in daily life, particularly in communications, weather forecasts and navigation. More importantly, the expanded use of space technology had also contributed to the improvement of the socio-economic conditions of developing countries. Remote sensing technology provided essential data for disaster warning and prevention and also critical information for land and ocean resources management. Rapidly developing space-based communications technology helped those countries which had extremely limited resources for the establishment of ground infrastructure for communications. That technology provided more opportunities for education and medical services to rural areas.

4. It was gratifying that, following the General Assembly's recommendation in 1995, the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space had found an innovative way of dealing with subjects of importance to all countries and had recommended that a special session of the Committee (UNISPACE III), open to all Member States of the United Nations, should be convened in 1999, unless the year 2000 was considered more appropriate.

5. Since its establishment the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space had led international efforts to maximize the benefits of space science and technology for all peoples. Its work had produced successful results: a legal regime for space activities had been established, consisting of five international treaties and four sets of principles. It was very gratifying to

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note that in 1996, the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space had finalized the draft 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. The Committee now had to review the draft declaration, with a view to its adoption by the General Assembly.

6. Considerable efforts had been made by the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and its two subcommittees to further improve their working methods, taking into account the current situation in the Organization and in the world. Their decision to replace summary records with unedited verbatim transcripts had been noted with interest by the General Assembly, as a result of which the Chairmen of the main committees had recently made an evaluation of that innovative cost-saving measure.

7. Finally, he expressed confidence that the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and its subcommittees would continue to respond to the demands and expectations of the global society. The members of the Committee should be able to provide advice to those bodies, as necessary.

8. Mr. HOHENFELLNER (Austria), Chairman of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, introducing the report of that Committee (A/51/20), said that the thirty-ninth session of the Committee had been marked by several important accomplishments as a result of intensive work by that Committee during the past decade in performing steps to adjust its activities in line with the current environment and had affirmed its commitment to continue to serve as the focal point in international cooperation during the next century.

9. The work of the Committee contributed to the achievement of the major goals of the Organization, particularly in the maintenance of international security and the advancement of socio-economic development. For many spacefaring nations, international cooperation was a way of sharing the financial burden of space activities; at the same time, the success of such cooperation would enhance mutual understanding and trust among participants. Cooperation between spacefaring nations and countries without space capability would undoubtedly accelerate the development of the latter countries. Recognizing the potential role of space technology in contributing to the maintenance of international security and the socio-economic development of countries, the Committee was exploring ways of playing an active role in implementing recommendations made by the General Assembly and recent United Nations global conferences, and also the recommendations set forth in An Agenda for Peace and An Agenda for Development.

10. At the same time, the Committee was aware of the challenges it had to face, caused, in particular, by the current financial situation within the Organization and in many countries, and recognized the possibility of further streamlining its work. The Committee firmly believed that changes in its work should not undermine its role as the focal point for international cooperation in outer space; it would undoubtedly maintain some of its current practices which had served it well and were deemed indispensable in fulfilling its future tasks.

11. As in previous years, the Committee's work had covered the following main areas: ways and means of maintaining outer space for peaceful purposes; the

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report of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee on the work of its thirty-third session (A/AC.105/637); the report of the Legal Subcommittee on the work of its thirty-fifth session (A/AC.105/639); and a review of spin-off benefits of space technology. The Committee had also discussed the convening of a third United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNISPACE III).

12. During the joint consideration of the report of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee and implementation of the recommendations of the Second UNISPACE Conference (UNISPACE 82), the Committee had considered on a priority basis 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, the use of nuclear-power sources in outer space, and space debris.

13. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 50/27, the Working Group of the Whole, which had been reconvened, had made several recommendations which were contained in its report (A/AC.105/637, annex II). While the Working Group had noted with satisfaction the valuable efforts to implement the recommendations of UNISPACE 82, it had identified four priority areas where further efforts should be made to promote the applications of space science and technology for development: stimulation and support of the growth of indigenous nuclei and an autonomous technological base in space technology in developing countries; promotion of a greater exchange of actual experiences in space applications; and funding of the Programme of Space Applications and voluntary contributions for its activities.

14. Efforts made by the Office for Outer Space Affairs regarding stimulation and support of the growth of indigenous capability in space technology in developing countries had resulted in the opening of the first nine-month education programme in remote-sensing at the Centre for Space Science and Technology Education in Asia and the Pacific. Centres in the other regions covered by the United Nations economic commissions were expected to be established and become operational by 1997. However, more international efforts were needed to eliminate obstacles in the exchange of scientific and technological information and the transfer of appropriate technologies to promote the use of space technology in developing countries.

15. The reductions due to the current financial situation of the Organization had affected the activities of the Programme on Space Applications planned for the 1996-1997 biennium, some of which had been cancelled or postponed. Considering that voluntary contributions covered two thirds of the cost of the activities, Member States and international organizations were once again urged to make cash or in-kind contributions to support the Programme. Notwithstanding the financial crisis, the Programme had continued to make utmost efforts to respond to the ever-increasing demands of Member States. The Committee had expressed its appreciation to the Member States which had supported the Programme in 1996 by holding workshops, training courses and seminars.

16. The Committee had agreed with the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee that it was important to have a firm scientific and technical basis for future action on the complex attributes of space debris, and that the Subcommittee should focus on understanding aspects of research related to space debris. In

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that connection, the Committee had noted the important progress made by the Subcommittee on specific topics relating to space debris. At its latest session, the Subcommittee had concentrated on the topic of measurements of space debris and had initiated the preparation of a technical report, which would be updated every year.

17. The Committee had also noted the discussions in the Subcommittee on space transportation systems; examination of the physical nature and technical attributes of the geostationary orbit; matters related to life sciences, including space medicine; progress in the global-change programme; and matters relating to planetary exploration and astronomy. The Committee had recommended that those items should be retained on the Subcommittee's agenda.

18. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 50/27, the Subcommittee had considered the special theme "Utilization of micro- and small satellites for the expansion of low-cost space activities, taking into account the special needs of developing countries". On behalf of the Committee, he wished to thank both the Committee on Space Research (COSPAR) and the International Astronautical Federation (IAF) for their continued support of the Subcommittee's work. The theme chosen for special attention at the 1997 session had been "Space systems for direct broadcasting and global information systems for space research". The Subcommittee had also considered matters related to the convening of UNISPACE III.

19. A significant achievement had been made on the issue of outer-space benefits by the Legal Subcommittee at its thirty-fifth session. Its Working Group had made considerable progress in elaborating the text of a draft Declaration on International Cooperation in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, which the Committee had adopted by consensus. The Committee now recommended that Declaration for adoption by the General Assembly. The Declaration was an important addition to the significant body of space law developed by the United Nations.

20. With regard to the definition and delimitation of outer space and to the character and utilization of the geostationary orbit, the Working Group on that item had once again been reconvened. Concerning the definition and delimitation of outer space, the Working Group had focused on the replies from Member States to the questionnaire on possible legal issues with regard to aerospace objects. Following a discussion of the replies received, the Committee had agreed that States members of the Subcommittee wishing to submit replies to the questionnaire should be encouraged to do so as soon as possible. The Committee had also agreed with the Legal Subcommittee that the Secretariat should provide the Subcommittee with a comprehensive analysis of all the replies.

21. On the issue of the geostationary orbit, the Committee had noted the constructive exchange of views on the ideas contained in the working paper "Some considerations concerning the utilization of the geostationary satellite orbit" (A/AC.105/C.2/L.200 and Corr.1). The Committee had agreed with the Subcommittee that the Secretariat, in cooperation with the secretariat of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), should provide, for the 1997 session of the Subcommittee, an analysis of the compatibility of the approach contained in the working paper with the existing rules and procedures of ITU relating to the use of the geostationary orbit.

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22. In accordance with paragraph 12 of resolution 50/27 the Legal Subcommittee had also reviewed its requirement for summary records. The Chairman of the Subcommittee had conducted further open-ended informal consultations with its members concerning its working methods, including the inclusion of new items in its agenda. The Subcommittee's recommendations on those matters had been taken into account during the Committee's consideration of working methods.

23. The Committee had also continued its consideration of the item "Ways and means of maintaining outer space for peaceful purposes". It had reaffirmed its belief that current efforts should be continued to strengthen the Committee's role in maintaining outer space for peaceful purposes. Concerning the important item "Spin-off benefits of space technology: review of current status", the Committee had agreed that spin-offs of space technology were yielding substantial benefits in many fields. Recent spin-offs had included a lightweight metal-cutter for emergency rescue operations, a new greenhouse for agricultural crops, new foods and medicines, and a honeycomb fireproof insulation material. The Committee had agreed that a dialogue and exchange of experience could assist all countries in applying space technology to the solution of common problems. In that connection it expressed its satisfaction that the United Nations Programme on Space Applications had organized, in April 1996, the United Nations/United States of America International Conference on Spin-off Benefits of Space Technology: Challenges and Opportunities.

24. Pursuant to the decisions and recommendations contained in General Assembly resolution 50/27 the Committee had discussed matters relating to the convening of a third UNISPACE conference and matters related to possible alternative means of meeting the objectives of such a conference, taking into account the work of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee. On the recommendation of the General Assembly, the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee, through its Working Group of the Whole, had continued its effort to complete the development and refinement of a framework which would make it possible to evaluate proposals and consider all possibilities of achieving the final objectives of the conference. The Working Group's report reflected its deliberations on the objectives and organization of the conference and other means of achieving its goals, as well as additional ideas submitted by delegations and the specific proposals made by some Member States. The Subcommittee had agreed that the Working Group's report provided the basis for the Committee to carry out the task entrusted to it by the General Assembly. At its 1996 session the Committee had agreed that a special session of the Committee (UNISPACE III), open to all Member States, should be convened at the United Nations Office at Vienna, preferably in 1999, unless the rate of progress towards an agreed agenda at the 1997 session of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee made it more appropriate to hold the special session in 2000. The Committee had also agreed to act as the preparatory committee and that its Scientific and Technical Subcommittee and the Secretariat should act as the advisory committee and executive secretariat respectively. The Committee had proposed that at its 1997 session the advisory committee should finalize the agenda and work out the organizational aspects of the special session and a schedule of events, as well as outlining the desirable form of participation of relevant international, regional and other governmental and non-governmental organizations in the preparatory work.

25. At its 1996 session, the Committee had conducted a thorough review of its working methods and the work of its subsidiary bodies. In accordance with

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General Assembly 50/27 it had reconvened the Working Group of the Whole. The Working Group had considered such questions as the composition of and election to the offices of the Committee and its subsidiary bodies, rules of procedure, duration of sessions, inclusion of new items in the agenda of the Legal Subcommittee, records of the Committee and its Legal Subcommittee, and other issues relating to the rationalization and improvement of working methods. The principle of consensus had also been discussed.

26. As the Chairman of the Fourth Committee had already noted, COPUOS had contributed to the cost-saving efforts of the Organization by pioneering the use of unedited verbatim transcripts as the records of its meetings. It was a matter for satisfaction that the Committee on Conferences had become interested in that cost-saving measure and had invited other committees to consider using it. As requested by the General Assembly, the Committee would report to it in 1997 on its experience of using transcripts. As already mentioned, the Legal Subcommittee had also reviewed its requirement for summary records, and beginning at its 1997 session it would be provided with unedited transcripts instead of summary records.

27. The Legal Subcommittee had made some progress with respect to the rationalization and improvement of its working methods. At each session it adopted a list of specific measures to optimize its use of conference services. At the 1996 session the Committee had further reviewed its working methods, in particular the composition of and election to the offices of the Committee and its Subcommittee. The Committee had been unable to reach a consensus on that important issue or on the duration of sessions and the inclusion of new items in the agenda of the Legal Subcommittee. As a result the Committee had requested its Chairman to hold informal inter-sessional consultations among the Committee's members with a view to producing consensus decisions before its next session. The Committee had further recommended that all proposals of delegations and groups of delegations, including proposals concerning the need to restructure the agenda and the duration of sessions, should be taken fully into account during the informal consultations. Two sessions of such consultations had already been held in Vienna and, while a consensus had not yet been reached on the issues, there had been very constructive discussions of the ideas contained in the informal working papers and of additional proposals made by delegations during the consultations.

28. While the Committee was ready to make substantial changes in its working methods, it had reaffirmed its commitment to maintaining the fundamental concept of its decision-making process - the principle of consensus. The informal inter-sessional consultations had shown that the maintenance of that principle was crucial to the successful conduct of the Committee's work. The Committee had adopted five treaties and five sets of principles and had held two UNISPACE conferences even at the height of the cold war and despite the North-South differences which had become evident since the 1970s. That showed that the States members of the Committee had contributed in good faith to its decision-making. It was to be hoped that all the members of the Committee would continue to contribute to its work as long as the principle of consensus was maintained.

29. The time was ripe for the Committee to play an active role to achieve the major goals of the Organization and to serve the interests of the international community more effectively. As further progress was made in the research and

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development of space science and technology, the Committee should ensure that science and technology did not become another tool used to widen the technological and economic gap between the developed and the developing world. It should ensure that those technologies would not be used to threaten international peace and security. With the adoption of the declaration on international cooperation in the exploration and use of outer space and the holding of UNISPACE III, the Committee would have much more responsibility in the coming years and into the next century.

30. Mr. CHEN Shiqiu (China) said that more and more countries were attaching great importance to the application of space technologies. Areas for the peaceful uses of outer space had broadened and international cooperation in that field had further strengthened. With support from States and international organizations, the outer space programmes of the United Nations had made valuable contributions to the promotion and coordination of outer space activities. His delegation greatly valued the work done by the relevant United Nations organs and agencies in implementing programmes for the utilization of outer space.

31. The utilization of space technologies in his country was especially noteworthy in such fields as the formulation of cultural and educational programmes, the raising of the overall level of science and technology of the nation, the development of the communication and information industries, the exploitation of natural resources and the mitigation of natural disasters. In an effort to promote sustainable development, his Government had incorporated space technology programmes into the overall national strategy for development as part of the national plan for the medium- and long-term development of science and technology for the period from 2000 to 2020.

32. During the 40 years since the inception of space activity in China, an integral system of research and design had been set up, experimental and serial production and testing had been introduced, and better equipped launching centres, capable of launching various types of satellites, and a corresponding network for tracking and control had been established. The Long March series of rocket carriers successfully developed and put into use in China were used to place satellites in low-earth, sun-synchronous and geostationary orbits. On 10 October 1996, China had successfully put its seventeenth retrievable remote sensing satellite into orbit. It was among the most advanced States in such important fields as retrievable satellites, multi-satellite launching by a single rocket, low-temperature rocket-fuel technology, the use of rockets bundled with boosters, the launching of geostationary satellites and the technology of tracking and control.

33. The forty-seventh annual Congress of the International Federation of Astronauts, which had recently been held in Beijing, had been a great success. It had been attended by more than 3,000 experts on astronomy, scholars and government officials from over 50 countries. The participants had held wide-ranging discussions on the developing trends in space technology and its utilization in the twenty-first century and had actively promoted international cooperation for the peaceful exploitation and utilization of space resources.

34. One of the results achieved by the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) at its thirty-ninth session had been the adoption of the draft

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declaration on international cooperation in the exploration and utilization of outer space. That had concluded 10 years of discussion of the benefits of outer space and was an important and positive achievement. His delegation hoped that the draft Declaration would be adopted at the current session of the General Assembly and that all States, particularly the developed space Powers, would participate in the promotion of international cooperation in outer space in accordance with the principles set out in the declaration.

35. His Government believed that international cooperation in outer space should be based on mutual benefit, complementarity and common development and that cooperation should take widely varying forms. On that basis, his country had concluded agreements on cooperation in space technology with many countries, achieving excellent cooperation in the manufacture and launching of satellites, manned space flights and other applications of space technology. His Government would make great efforts to broaden its cooperation in outer space with the rest of the world so that space technology would bring greater benefits to mankind.

36. At the thirty-ninth session of COPUOS there had been a lively discussion of UNISPACE III. His delegation welcomed the proposal to hold such a conference for the purpose of summing up the implementation of the programmes for the utilization of outer space and of the recommendations of UNISPACE II, which had been held in 1982, with a view to formulating new objectives and measures for the twenty-first century. His country supported the view that UNISPACE III should be held no later than the year 2000 and agreed with the preliminary recommendations on the arrangements for the Conference set out in the report of COPUOS. To ensure the success of the Conference the preparatory work should be started immediately.

37. His delegation noted with satisfaction the efforts made in recent years by COPUOS and by its Scientific and Technical Subcommittee to improve their working methods, and the results that had been achieved. His delegation was in favour of continuing consultations on improving the working methods of the Committee. It considered that the existing arrangements for the composition of, and elections to, the bureau of the Committee had played a positive role, but also had negative aspects, including the failure to reflect the actual situation of international relations and the lack of equitable regional representation. For that reason, his country understood and supported the call for reform made by the majority of the members of COPUOS and endorsed the position of principle of the Group of 77. Any decisions on reform should be reached on the basis of consensus.

38. His delegation did not believe that the question of the duration of meetings was merely a procedural matter. COPUOS should play a greater role in promoting international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space, strengthening the international legal order in space, stimulating scientific and technological progress in the developing countries and helping them to share in the spin-off benefits of space technology. The existing schedule of meetings accommodated the various positions of delegations and had a certain flexibility. What mattered most was that the members had reached a consensus that the duration of each session should be decided in a flexible manner, without prejudice to the introduction of new agenda items, and that every effort should be made to conclude sessions as early as possible.

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39. At present, new agenda items mainly concerned the Legal Subcommittee. Since it had already concluded its discussion of the question of outer space benefits, new items should be included on its agenda. In that regard, the five new alternative items proposed by the Czech Republic, Chile, Mexico and other countries merited further study.

40. The change in the international situation was conducive to the establishment of a sound international legal order in space, to the peaceful uses of outer space and to international cooperation in that field. It was to be hoped that, through the joint efforts of all its members, COPUOS would overcome the difficulties and achieve still greater results. As a developing space Power, China would continue to support and promote international cooperation in space.

41. Mr. CORVIN (Ireland), speaking on behalf of the European Union and also of Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Iceland, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, said that the European Union considered that COPUOS had an important role to play in providing a forum for the exchange of information on developments in space technology and the progress of space law. In that connection, the European Union reiterated its commitment to the work of that Committee and welcomed the initiative of one of its member States relating to the establishment of a network of space science and technology institutions for east-central and south-eastern Europe.

42. He thanked the Chairman of COPUOS for his report on the work of the Committee over the past year and noted the various proposals put forward whereby the offices of Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Rapporteur of COPUOS and of the Chairmen of the Subcommittees should be subject to elections. He also noted that an appropriate balance would be required in considering the proposals on elections and the distribution of offices, the duration of sessions and the agenda. The efforts of the Chairman of COPUOS in holding informal consultations and his intention to present the results thereof to the Committee at its next session were to be commended.

43. Among the studies conducted over the past year by COPUOS and its Subcommittees, mention should be made of the examination of the possible uses of new small or micro-satellites which had helped to identify a number of areas where developing countries could benefit from the new technology coming on stream. It was clear that technologies were becoming increasingly accessible, and less developed nations should therefore be kept informed of the possibilities. The European Union welcomed the studies undertaken to date and urged a further intensification of cooperation between States in those fields.

44. The European Union hoped that the draft declaration on international cooperation recommended by COPUOS would be adopted by consensus by the General Assembly.

45. Substantial progress had been achieved by the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee in its work on the problem of space debris. It was important to prevent a proliferation of such debris in the future and to minimize the risk of collisions between pieces of debris and satellites or other aerospace objects.

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46. The European Union had in the past expressed reservations with regard to the proposal to convene a third UNISPACE Conference. However, at the thirty-ninth session of COPUOS, it had been agreed that a special session of that Committee, open to all Members of the United Nations, would be convened and would be known as UNISPACE III. The European Union looked forward to the report of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee, which had been given the task, in 1997, of finalizing the agenda for the special session.

47. The European Union once again called strongly on COPUOS to ensure a focused and sedulous approach to its task. It welcomed the agreement between COPUOS and its Legal Subcommittee that unedited transcripts should be provided in lieu of verbatim records; that would result in considerable savings and was in keeping with the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences for all meetings taking place within the United Nations system.

48. Mr. APUNTE (Ecuador) said that particular emphasis had been placed in the report of COPUOS on the importance of strengthening international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space. COPUOS acknowledged the importance of ensuring that remote sensing data and processed information were available to all countries in a timely manner and at reasonable cost. The advantages of using data which ensured effective cooperation in such fields as agriculture, the environment, early warning of natural disasters and meteorology were obvious. In that context, the United Nations programme on the utilization of space technology had enabled his own country to accumulate positive experience in the operation and funding of a terrestrial satellite data receiving station in the province of Cotopaxi.

49. His delegation considered that the characteristics of the geostationary orbit made it essential to establish an independent, sui generis, legal regime to regulate access to and utilization of, the orbit by all countries, taking into account the needs of the developing countries, particularly the equatorial developing countries.

50. His delegation supported the text of the draft declaration on international cooperation in the exploration and use of outer space.

51. With regard to the Committee's working methods, his delegation supported the view that the bureau of the Committee should include five representatives elected on the basis of the principle of equitable geographical distribution and the principle of rotation between the five regions, in accordance with the rules of procedure of the General Assembly. Those principles should also be reflected in the work of the Subcommittees.

52. His delegation also considered that any changes to the agenda of COPUOS and its subsidiary bodies would be effective only if they resulted in a broadening of the agenda and did not weaken it by deleting current items. His delegation wished to cooperate with the working group that was engaged in the study of those matters.

The meeting rose at 11.35 a.m.