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Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space

Note verbale dated 28 January 2022 from the Permanent Mission of the United States of America to the United Nations (Vienna) addressed to the Secretary-General*

The Permanent Mission of the United States of America to the United Nations (Vienna) presents its compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and has the honour to refer to the note verbale addressed to the Secretary-General dated 3 December 2021 from the Permanent Mission of China to the United Nations (Vienna) ([A/AC.105/1262](#)).

The United States offers the comments set out below.

- 1. Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, and commitments to international cooperation**
 - The United States is committed to sustainable, rules-based activities in outer space, whether those activities are performed by Governments or by non-governmental entities, including the private sector.
 - As one of the three depositary Governments for the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, the United States views adherence by all nations to the Treaty's principles as the fundamental foundation for nations' conduct in outer space.
 - The United States upholds its obligations as contained in the Outer Space Treaty and other applicable international commitments and urges all nations to uphold their commitments as well.
 - In addition to the legal framework established by the Outer Space Treaty, the United States was pleased to join the consensus in the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space to adopt the preamble and 21 guidelines for the long-term sustainability of outer space activities ([A/74/20](#), annex II). These voluntary, non-legally binding guidelines were adopted unanimously as the first-ever set of best practices for space operations.
 - As noted in the preamble, the long-term sustainability of outer space activities is consistent with, and supports, the objectives of the Outer Space Treaty, as such objectives are integrally associated with a commitment to conducting space activities in a manner that addresses

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- the basic need to ensure that the environment in outer space remains suitable for exploration and use by current and future generations.
- Several of these guidelines can specifically enhance the safety of human spaceflight operations, including:
 - Guideline B.1: Provide updated contact information and share information on space objects and orbital events
 - Guideline B.2: Improve accuracy of orbital data on space objects and enhance the practice and utility of sharing orbital information on space objects
 - Guideline B.3: Promote the collection, sharing and dissemination of space debris monitoring information
 - Guideline B.4: Perform conjunction assessment during all orbital phases of controlled flight
 - Guideline B.8: Design and operation of space objects regardless of their physical and operational characteristics
 - The United States urges all nations to abide by their commitments and implement the above guidelines.

2. Ensuring spaceflight safety

- The future space operating environment will be shaped by a significant increase in the volume and diversity of activity by the private sector in space. The United States recognizes that spaceflight safety is a global challenge. In this regard, the United States will continue to demonstrate how space activities can be conducted in a responsible and sustainable manner, while emphasizing the need for international transparency, cooperation and communication.
- The United States is committed to working with all nations to sustain the outer space environment for the benefit of all humanity, ensuring timely warning of potential hazards to space operations and enhancing human spaceflight safety.
 - As noted in the United States Space Priorities Framework released on 1 December 2021, the United States will continue to share space situational awareness information and provide basic spaceflight safety services to all space operators.
- As a key part of this commitment, the Government of the United States conducts screenings of all active space objects for potential on-orbit collisions. The United States Space Command is currently the lead organization of the Government of the United States for supporting safe space operations through the monitoring and cataloguing of all activity to, in and from space.
 - In cases where a potential collision hazard is calculated, the United States Space Command – through the United States Space Force’s 18th Space Control Squadron – provides relevant analysis to all affected spacecraft operators, including to China, to support their decisions on collision-avoidance manoeuvres.
 - Since November 2014, the United States has provided spaceflight safety information to the Government of China, including emergency notifications of high-risk collision hazards between crewed and robotic Chinese spacecraft and other space objects.
 - In the specific instances cited in the note verbale from China to the Secretary-General, the United States Space Command did not estimate a significant probability of collision between the China Space Station and the referenced United States spacecraft:
 - Starlink-1095 (2020-001BK) on 1 July 2021

- Starlink-2305 (2021-024N) on 21 October 2021
- Because the activities did not meet the threshold of established emergency collision criteria, emergency notifications were not warranted in either case.
- If there had been a significant probability of collision involving the China Space Station, the United States would have provided a close approach notification directly to the designated Chinese point of contact.
- The United States is unaware of any contact or attempted contact by China with the United States Space Command, the operators of Starlink-1095 and Starlink-2305 or any other United States entity to share information or concerns about the stated incidents prior to the note verbale from China to the Secretary General.

3. Information-sharing for human spaceflight safety

- The United States believes that detailed consultations on measures to reduce the risk of collision between United States space objects and the human spaceflight activities of other nations should be conducted directly, through bilateral channels, to facilitate efficient and timely sharing of information and coordination of potentially urgent responses.
- In this regard, the United States urges all nations, in particular those with human spaceflight missions, to provide updated contact information on designated entities authorized to engage in timely exchanges of appropriate information on on-orbit human spacecraft operations, in particular those entities that are responsible for adopting precautionary and response measures for crewed missions.
 - Designated entities are encouraged to register for no-cost accounts on the website www.space-track.org of the Government of the United States. The Government administers www.space-track.org to provide access to the United States space catalogue, as well as to disseminate additional spaceflight safety assessments and information to spacecraft operators.
 - Designated entities with www.space-track.org accounts would be able to access the results of conjunction screenings for their crewed and non-crewed space missions and obtain contact information for other space object operators.
 - These conjunction assessments are provided in the Conjunction Data Message format established under International Organization for Standardization standard 19389:2014.
- The United States urges all spacefaring nations to work constructively to reduce the risk of collision between space objects and with human spaceflight activities. These efforts should include international cooperation to implement the Guidelines for the Long-term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, giving priority to human spaceflight operations.