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UNODA/UNIDIR Space Law Bootcamp

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UNOOSA: Secretariat to COPUOS

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Overview of UNOOSA

GATEWAY

The sole UN agency dedicated entirely to Space



CONVENER

Facilitates global cooperation among UN Member States

CAPACITY BUILDER

Access to space-data, Space Law and Policy Advisory Services

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History and Mandates

Established in NY in 1957
Moved to Vienna in 1992

Secretariat to UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) & its subcommittees

International cooperation & capacity development on technical, legal, policy, & scientific aspects of space

Private sector activities - massive driver of increasing work of COPUOS



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Governance of outer space activities
What is COPUOS?



Photo credit: UNIS Vienna

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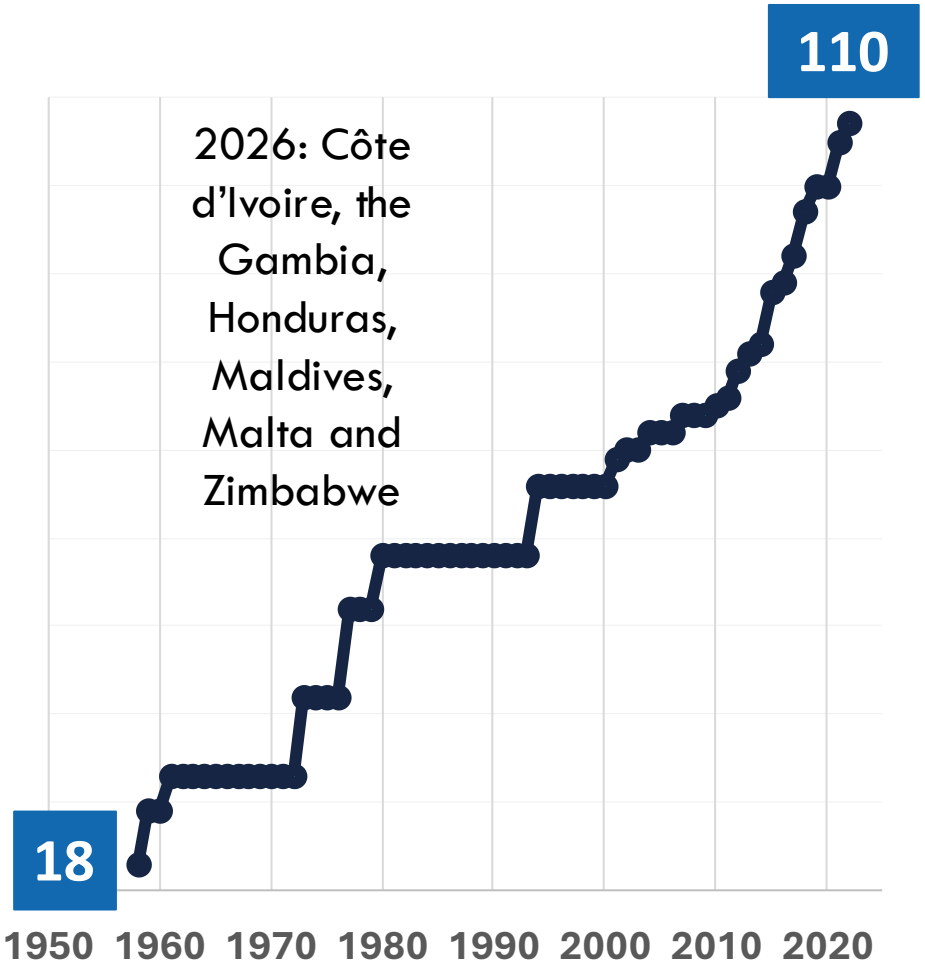
COPUOS: Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space


Photo credit: UNIS Vienna

- Growth from **18** MSs to **110** in 2025
- COPUOS meets 3 times Q1-2 per year
- **Two sub-committees:**
    1. Scientific & Technical (STSC)
    2. Legal (LSC)
- **Multiple new topics** (technical & legal) are being discussed
- More intersessional meetings requested
- Greater capacity-building required to support MS' decision-making

COPUOS: Home of Space



- **Consensus-based decisions:** All Member States treated alike

- **Reports to 4th Committee of the UNGA:** Resolution on the peaceful uses of outer space

GATEWAY



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CAPACITY BUILDER

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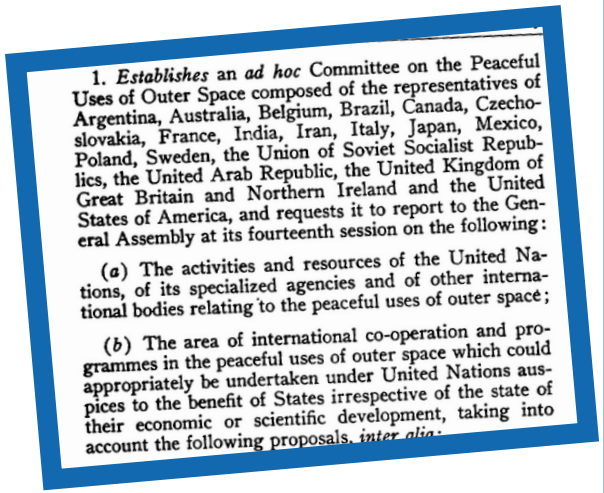
The History: A Timeline

1950s-60s — COPUOS & UNOOSA established

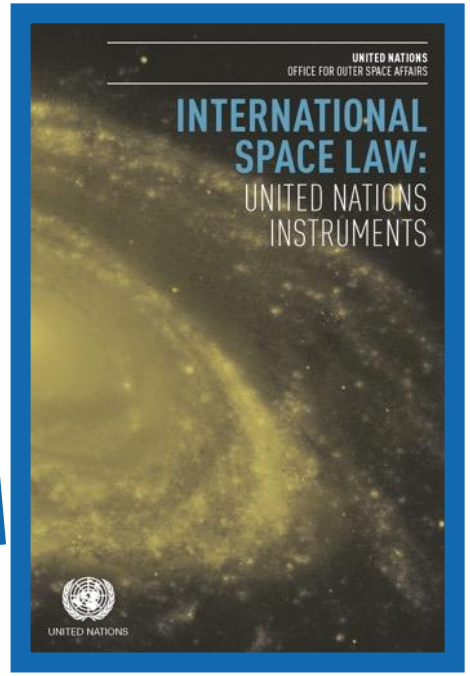


1. *Establishes* an *ad hoc* Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space composed of the representatives of Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Czechoslovakia, France, India, Iran, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Poland, Sweden, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United Arab Republic, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America, and requests it to report to the General Assembly at its fourteenth session on the following:

(*a*) The activities and resources of the United Nations, of its specialized agencies and of other international bodies relating to the peaceful uses of outer space;

(*b*) The area of international co-operation and programmes in the peaceful uses of outer space which could appropriately be undertaken under United Nations auspices to the benefit of States irrespective of the state of their economic or scientific development, taking into account the following proposals, *inter alia*:

1960s-70s — Treaty development



1980s-90s — Principles on outer space

2000s-10s — Development of soft law



2010s — UNISPACE+50 and Space2030

2024 — Pact for the Future



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Pact for the Future

A Call to Action by Heads of State to COPUOS

Safe and sustainable use of space plays a critical role in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda:



Action 56. We will Strengthen international cooperation for the exploration and use of Outer Space for Peaceful Purposes and for the benefit of all Humanity

We decide to:

a) Reaffirm the importance of the widest possible adherence to and full compliance with the 1967 Outer Space Treaty and **discuss the establishment of new frameworks for space traffic, space debris, and space resources through COPUOS**

b) Invite the engagement of relevant private sector, civil society, and other relevant **stakeholders**, where appropriate and applicable, **to contribute to intergovernmental processes** related to the increased safety and sustainability of outer space.

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COPUOS: Subcommittees Working Groups, Other Mechanisms

Photo credit: UNIS Vienna

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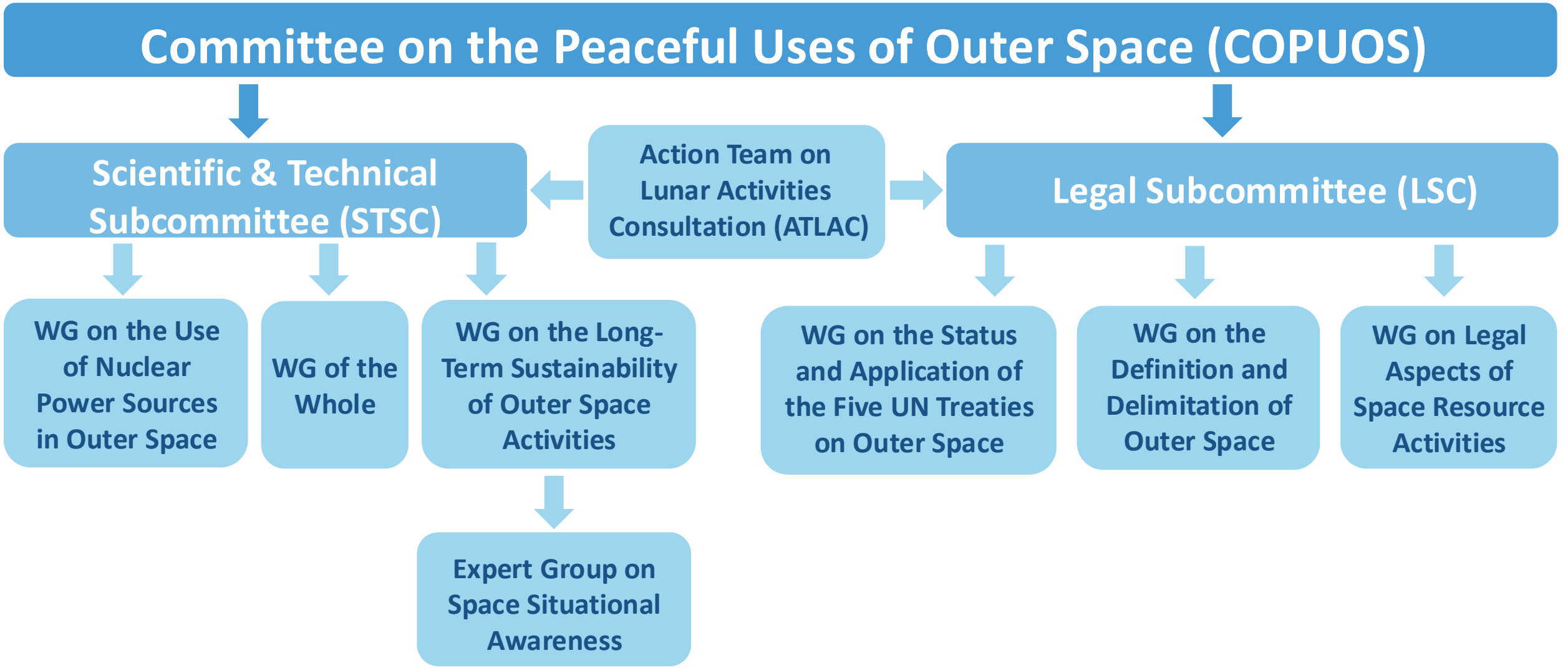
COPUOS Subsidiary Bodies



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WG on Legal Aspects of Space Resource Activities (SC)

5-year workplan (A/AC.105/1260 Annex II, Appendix)

The Working Group will finalise principles by 2027



Photo credit: European Space Agency

Mandate (A/76/20, Annex III):

Study existing legal frameworks for space resource activities & assess the benefits of further developing framework activities

Draft Principles:

- **Promote fairness:** all countries to benefit
  - Not just early movers
- Protect celestial environments through safe & **sustainable** practices.
- Measures to **prevent harmful contamination** of outer space & celestial bodies
- Reiterates **non-appropriation**

Developments from LSC:

- **Consideration of the headings & preambular paragraphs**
- **Focus on non-appropriation, equitable use, cooperation, definition of space resource activities & control mechanisms**

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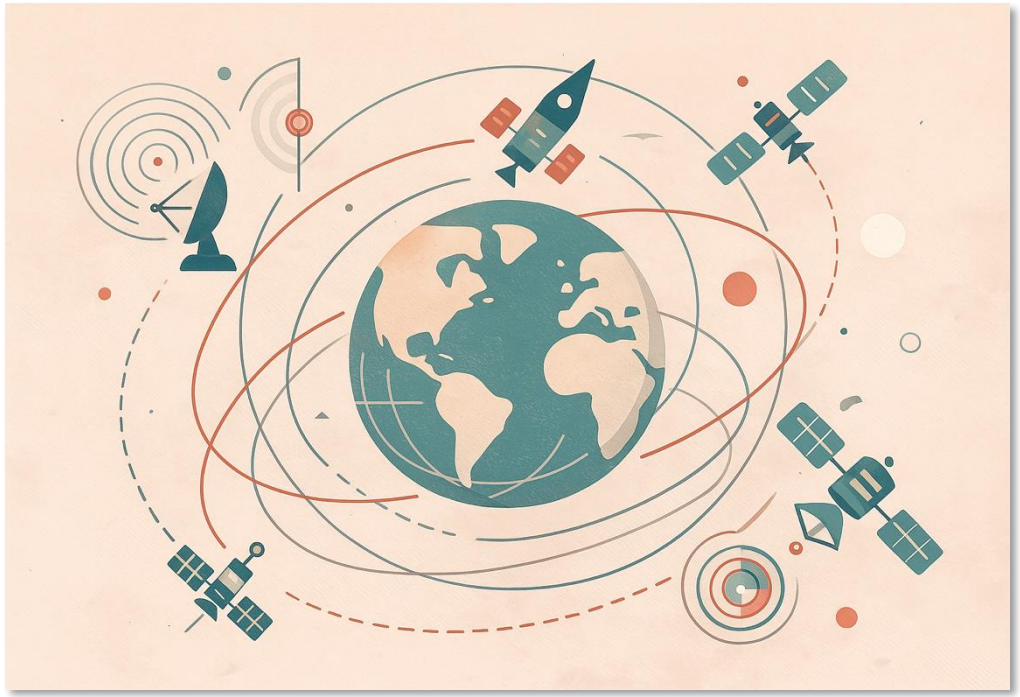
Expert Group on Space Situational Awareness

Established under the Working Group on the Long-term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities (LTS WG)



Mandate:

- Improve global coordination on conjunction risks
- Identify minimum information needed for Coordination
- Enhance contact mechanisms between Operators
- Examine compatibility of SSA data systems and formats
- Support capacity-building for emerging space actors

Goal:

➢ Enable **a global space traffic coordination (STC)** mechanism.

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The Existing International Framework



Photo credit: UNIS Vienna

Why space law?



Photo credit: NASA

1. Prevent outer space from becoming an area of **conflict**

2. Strengthen international cooperation and friendly **relations**

3. Distribute space **benefits** between States

4. Advance the exploration and use of outer space through the establishment of **core principles** applicable to States and, through *national implementation*, non-governmental entities

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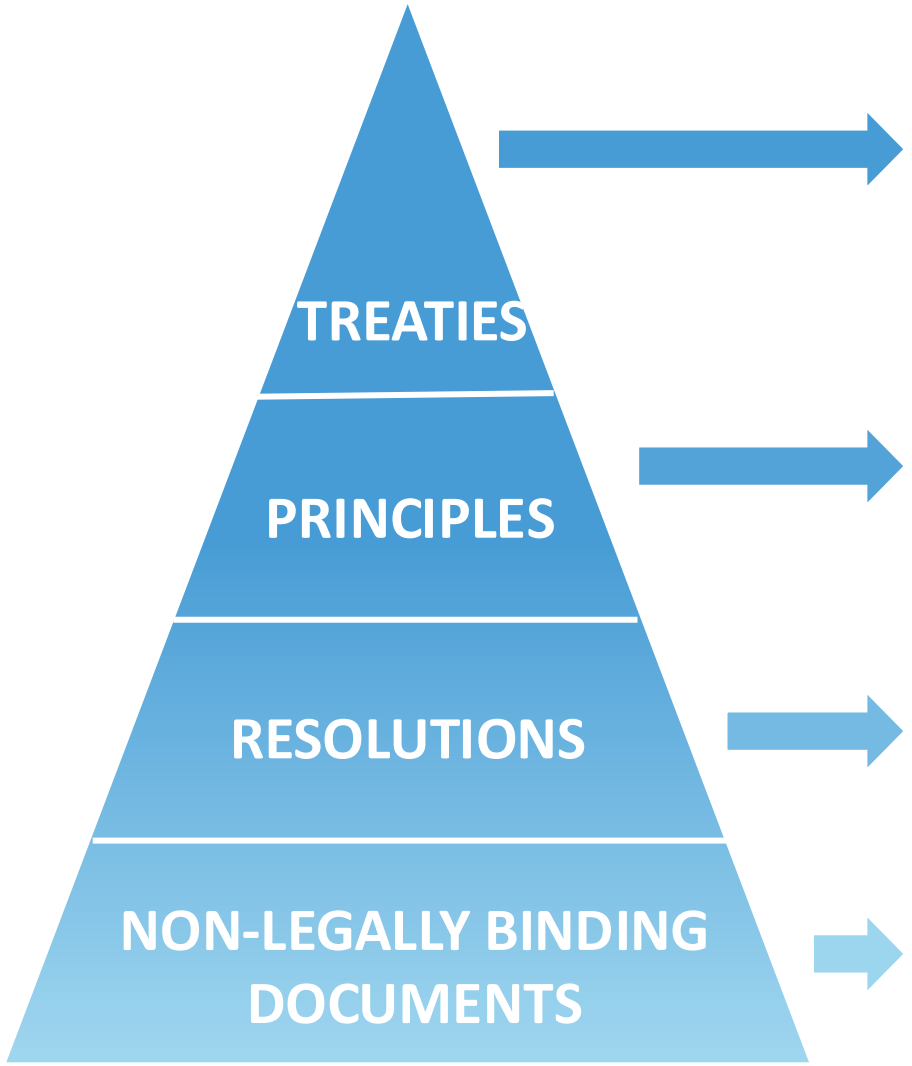
COPUOS: Delivering Results



- **Outer Space Treaty (1967)**
- **Rescue Agreement (1968)**
- **Liability Convention (1972)**
- **Registration Convention (1975)**
- **Moon Agreement (1979)**

- Declaration of Legal Principles on Outer Space Activities (1963)
- Broadcasting Principles (1982)
- Remote Sensing Principles (1986)
- Nuclear Power Sources Principles (1992)
- Declaration on International Cooperation for the Benefits and in the Interest of All States (1996)

- Launching State (2004)
- Registration Practice (2007)
- National Space Legislation (2013)

- Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines (2007)
- Safety Framework for Nuclear Power Sources (2009)
- Guidelines for the Long-term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities (2019)

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The Outer Space Treaty

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Historic context

UN Declaration of Legal Principles

- First UNGA resolution on peaceful uses of outer space (Res. 1961 (Res. 1721, XVI))
- Established foundational principles: international law applies to outer space, peaceful use, and voluntary registration of space objects

1957

1963

1967

Early Space Era (1957–1966)

- 1957: *Sputnik I* launch marks beginning of space age
- Cold War rivalry between the US & USSR drives space exploration
- Growing awareness of risks & need for international rules

Outer Space Treaty (OST)

- Framework treaty establishing the core principles of international space law
- Designed to prevent an arms race in space and ensure peaceful, cooperative exploration
- Basis for all later UN space treaties, including ARRA

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The Outer Space Treaty Today


Photo credit: UNIS Vienna

- Status as of 1-1-2026:
  - 118 ratifications
  - 23 signatures 1 declaration of acceptance
  - 17 articles
  - Includes **all** major space-faring nations

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What does the Outer Space Treaty say?

- Art. I Exploration and use of outer space
- Art. II Non-appropriation
- Art. III International law applies
- Art. IV Peaceful purposes
- Art. V Assistance to astronauts
- Art. VI Responsibility for national activities
- Art. VII International liability
- Art. VIII Jurisdiction, control and registration
- Art. IX Environmental protection, due regard, avoiding harmful interference and consultation mechanism
- Art. XI Transparency & information sharing

Art. I: The 'Province of Humankind'

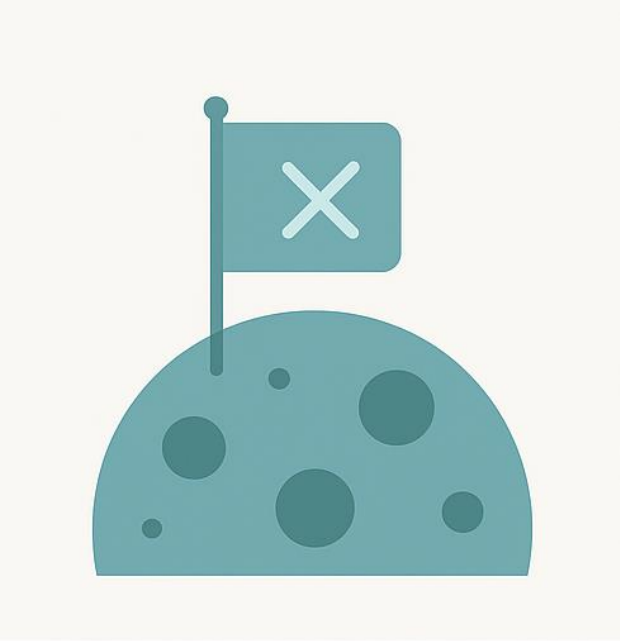
- **Key elements (<u>rights</u>):**
  - **Freedom of exploration and use (= a right!)**
  - **Non-discriminatory access**
  - **Scientific investigation free and open**

- **Why does it matter today?**
  Provides basis for discussions on fairness, access to data, equitable participation and global development.



Art. II: The 'Non Appropriation' Principle

- **States may not (<u>obligations</u>):**
  - **Claim sovereignty**
  - **Occupy territory**
  - **Establish ownership over celestial bodies**



- **Implications:**
  - Prevents territorial disputes.
  - Basis for all resource-related legal discussions and negotiations today.
  - Ensures the Moon and other celestial bodies are not subdivided into national zones.

Art. IV: Peaceful Use/Military Use

- **Prohibits:**
  - **Placement of nuclear weapons or WMD in orbit**
  - **Installation or stationing of WMD on celestial bodies**
  - **Military bases, fortifications, weapon testing or maneuvers on celestial bodies**
  - **Outer Space, the moon and celestial bodies shall be used for exclusively peaceful purposes**



- **Allows:**
  - **Use of military personnel for peaceful purposes**
  - **Use of equipment necessary for peaceful exploration**

This article is an enabling reason the space domain remaining stable for decades.

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Art. VI: State Responsibility (authorization and supervision)

- **States are (legally) responsible for <u>national</u> space activities:**
  - Governmental and non-governmental
  - Carried out anywhere (space, Moon, other celestial bodies)

- **States must:**
  - Authorise and
  - Continuously supervise activities of private actors (non-governmental entities, incl academia?)

Why does this matter?
Creates accountability, enables national licensing systems, and prevents harmful or unsafe operations.
= foundational article for national laws and regulations!

Art. VII: State Liability

- **(Launching) States are internationally liable for damage caused by their space objects**
  - On Earth / to aircraft: absolute liability
  - In space: fault-based liability

- Practical impact::
  - Encourages States to supervise private operators.
  - Forms legal backbone for claims after collisions or re-entry incidents.
  - **Foundational basis for the Liability Convention**



Art. VIII: Jurisdiction and Control

- **A State of registry retains:**
  - Jurisdiction and control over its space objects
  - Ownership of them, even after return to Earth
  - Legal authority over activities and personnel on board



- Basis for:
  - Registration of space objects
  - Gives certainty on which States laws apply to operations (jurisdiction)
  - Cooperation and transparency, foundational for the Registration Convention
  - **Return of objects under ARRA? Protects State property and right to return of objects**

Why does the OST still matter?

- More actors → more need for predictable rules
- Large constellations and crowding → due regard is key
- Debris → liability and responsibility matter more than ever
- Commercial actors → authorisation and supervision
- Re-entries → transparency and cooperation
- Regional governance → OST provides the baseline everywhere

The Treaty's principles are increasingly operational.

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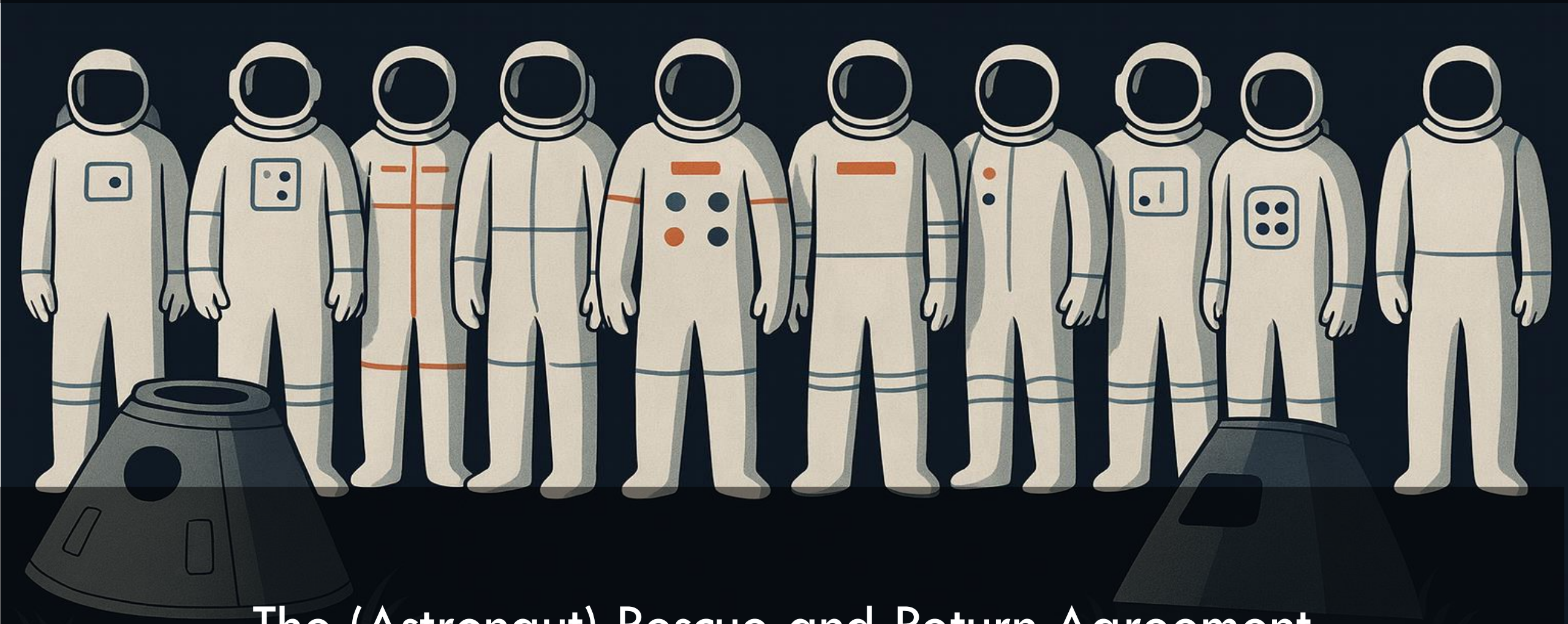

The (Astronaut) Rescue and Return Agreement

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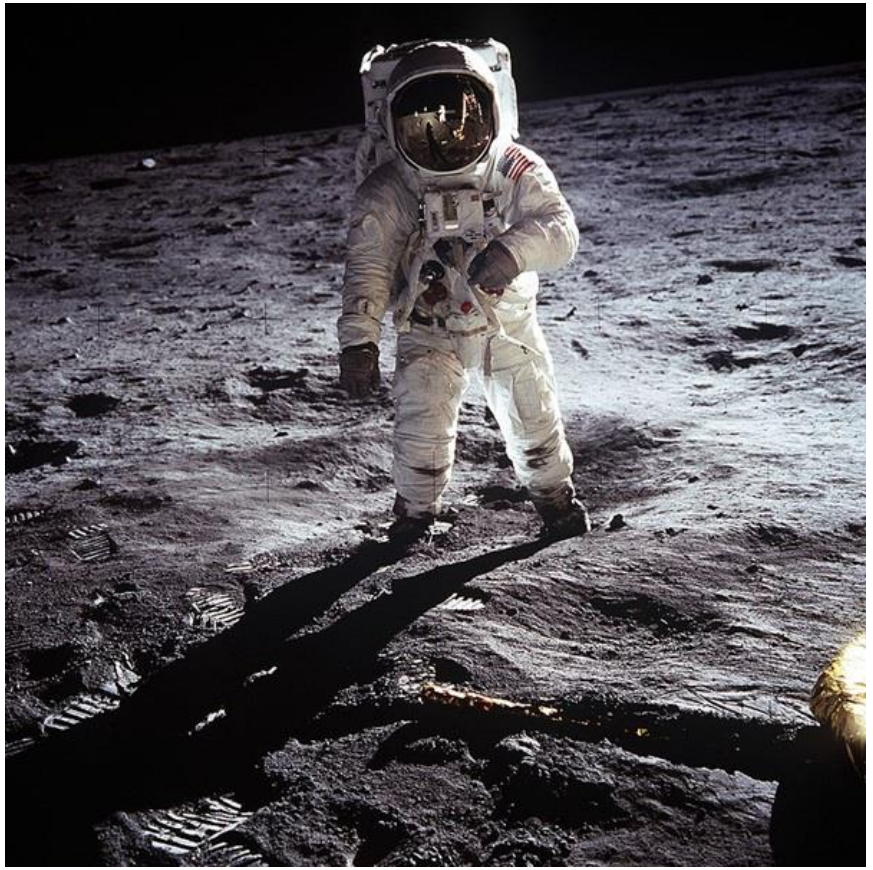
Overview of the Rescue and Return Agreement

Agreement on the Rescue of Astronauts, the Return of Astronauts and the Return of Objects Launched into Outer Space

- **Adopted:** 19 December 1967 (UNGA Res. 2345 (XXII))
  - **Opened for signature:** 22 April 1968
  - **Entered into force:** 3 December 1968
- **Part of the "core five" UN space treaties**
  → Implementing agreement to **Article V** of the 1967 Outer Space Treaty
- **Purpose:**
  - To ensure the rescue, assistance, and safe return of astronauts in distress
  - To provide a framework for the return of space objects to launching States
  - To strengthen international cooperation in manned spaceflight
- **Nature:**
  - Humanitarian instrument, built on cooperation even in times of tension
  - Procedural and operational, clarifies obligations under OST



ARRA today



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About Us | Our Work | Space4SDGs | Information for... | Events | Space Object Register | Documents

Our Work > Space Law > Treaties & Principles

Agreement on the Rescue of Astronauts, the Return of Astronauts and the Return of Objects Launched into Outer Space

The Rescue Agreement was considered and negotiated by the Legal Subcommittee from 1962 to 1967. Consensus agreement was reached in the General Assembly in 1967 (resolution 2345 (XXII)), and the Agreement entered into force in December 1968. The Agreement, elaborating on elements of articles 5 and 8 of the Outer Space Treaty, provides that States shall take all possible steps to rescue and assist astronauts in distress and promptly return them to the launching State, and that States shall, upon request, provide assistance to launching States in recovering space objects that return to Earth outside the territory of the Launching State.

AVAILABLE ONLINE RESOURCES FOR THE RESCUE AGREEMENT

- Treaty Status webpage
- Travaux Préparatoires

Symbol	Year	Title	Available languages
RES 2345 (XXII)	1967	Agreement on the Rescue of Astronauts, the Return of Astronauts and the Return of Objects Launched into Outer Space	عربي 中文 English Français Русский Español

- Status as of 1-1-2025:
  - 100 ratifications
  - 23 signatures
  - 3 declarations of acceptance

  - 10 articles (the shortest of the 5 treaties)
  - Includes **all** major space-faring nations

(UN Doc A/AC.105/C.2/2025/CRP.9)

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Why a new Agreement?

- **Outer space = 'hostile environment'** → accidents inevitable
- International cooperation essential: distress can occur anywhere on Earth
- Objects: risk of uncontrolled *re-entry* or *landing* in foreign territory
- Humans in distress: precedent from *law of the sea*: duty to render assistance
- Cold War tensions: astronauts *military, national heroes* and *intelligence assets*
- Mistrust: crash landings abroad posed security and diplomatic risks (secret technology)
- Need clear rules on *when, where, and how* rescue and return must take place
- Treaty response: create *predictable, humanitarian procedures* even between rivals



Space objects



- Aim: notification/return of space objects, component parts
  - Rationale: not *humanitarian* (astronauts) but *salvage* (objects)

- Information/discovery in territory under its jurisdiction/found on the high seas/in any other place not under its jurisdiction (i.e., anywhere): notification of the launching authority & the UNSG
  - *Not immediately*, as in case of astronauts

- Recovery: if found in a contracting state: the state shall take the steps it finds practicable to recover the object
  - Upon request, with assistance if requested
  - *Not immediately; not 'all possible' steps*

- **States may request reimbursement from the launching state for costs incurred in recovering and returning space objects**

Notifications under art. 5 ARRA

- Reported space objects discovered in Member States territories
  - http://www.unoosa.org/oosa/natact/sdnps/undd.html

- 1st: Nepal 1968, before ARRA in force
- 1st under ARRA: USA, 1969, from USSR?

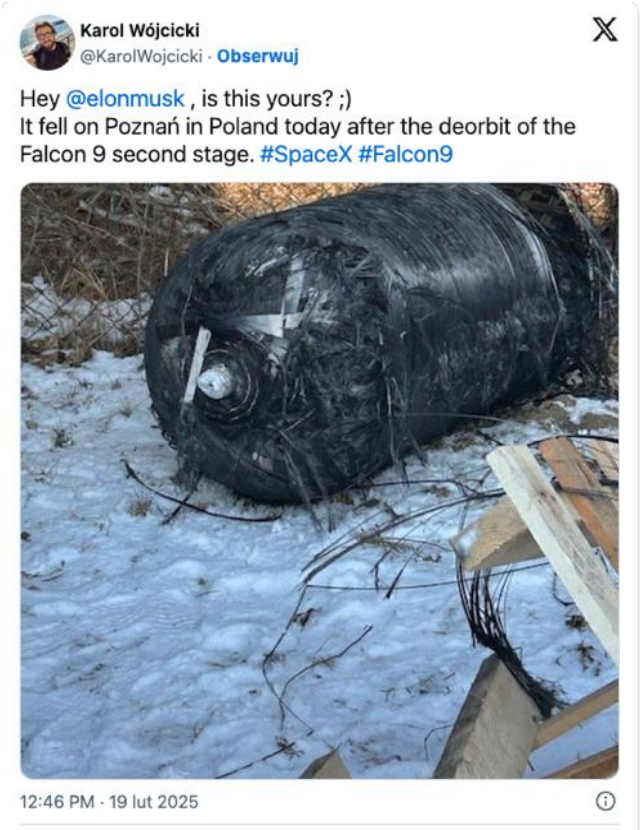
- Recent examples:
  - 2025 Poland, Falcon 9
  - 2025, Bahamas, Atlas V, New Glen, Starship
  - 2025 Turks & Caicos, Starship
  - 2024 Canada, SpaceX-Ax-3
  - 2023 Japan, a Chinese ventilation duct
  - 2022 Australia, Atlas V, SpaceX Dragon

LIST OF REPORTED SPACE OBJECTS DISCOVERED BY MEMBER STATES

In compliance with article 8 of the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies and article 5 of the Agreement on the Rescue of Astronauts, the Return of Astronauts and the Return of Objects Launched into Outer Space, Member States provide reports of space objects discovered in territory under its jurisdiction or on the high seas or in any other place not under the jurisdiction of any State. The following list is compiled from these notifications.

Number	Date of Discovery	Notifying State	Document Symbol	Location of Discovery	Physical Characteristics						Identifying features	Originating Space Object		Remarks
					Shape	Material	Length	Width/ Diameter	Height	Mass		Designator	Date of Launch	
Objects discovered in 2025														
	25 March 2025		A/AC.105/1365	Central-western Poland, in the vicinity of the town Poznań, Wielkopolska region Gołuski (+052.357° N, +016.752° E)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	----	----	The Government of Poland notes that it has reasonable grounds to believe that the United States of America is the launching authority
	22 March 2025		A/AC.105/1365	Central-western Poland, in the vicinity of the town Poznań, Wielkopolska region Krzyżkówko (+052.481° N, +016.006° E)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	----	----	The Government of Poland notes that it has reasonable grounds to believe that the United States of America is the launching authority
	11 March 2025		A/AC.105/1365	Central-western Poland, in the vicinity of the town Poznań, Wielkopolska region Łowyń (+052.487° N, +015.918° E)	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	----	----	The Government of Poland notes that it has reasonable grounds to believe that the United States of America is the launching authority

Recent examples…



2025, Poland, Falcon 9 2nd stage, 4 tons
Scattered across 9 areas



Dec 2024, Kenya, 500 kg



FRAGMENTO NUM 04
DIMENSIÓN 3 X 2 MTS
PESO APROX. 100 KG
UBICACIÓN ACTUAL ENA MAHAHUAL

2018, Mexico, ‘Galileo’, several pieces



The Liability Convention

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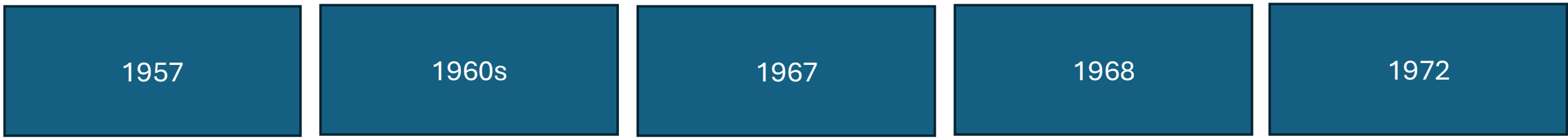
Historic context

UN Declaration of Legal Principles
- UNGA resolutions on peaceful uses of outer space
  Introducing core principles: state responsibility, assistance to astronauts, cooperation

Rescue and Return Agreement (ARRA)
→ Highlights the need for more concrete rules on *damage* and *compensation*.



Early Space Era (1957–1966)
- 1957: *Sputnik I* launch marks beginning of space age
- Cold War rivalry between the US & USSR drives space exploration
- Growing awareness of risks & need for international rules

Outer Space Treaty (OST)
- Framework treaty: Article VI form the basis for later agreements
- Liability for launching State (no distinction between absolute and fault based liability)

Liability Convention (LIAB)
→ Provides detailed procedures for *claims, investigation, and settlement*.
→ Defines *damage*, *launching State*, and types of liability (absolute vs. fault-based).

LIAB today

Convention on International Liability for Damage Caused by Space Objects

The Liability Convention was considered and negotiated by the Legal subcommittee from 1963 to 1972. Agreement was reached in the General Assembly in 1971 (resolution 2777 (XXVI)), and the Convention entered into force in September 1972. Elaborating on Article 7 of the Outer Space Treaty, the Liability Convention provides that a launching State shall be absolutely liable to pay compensation for damage caused by its space objects on the surface of the Earth or to aircraft, and liable for damage due to its faults in space. The Convention also provides for procedures for the settlement of claims for damages.

AVAILABLE ONLINE RESOURCES FOR THE LIABILITY CONVENTION

- Treaty Status webpage
- Travaux Préparatoires

Symbol	Year	Title	Available languages
RES 2777 (XXVI)	1971	Convention on International Liability for Damage Caused by Space Objects	عربي 中文 English Français Русский Español

Status as of 1-1-2025:

- 100 ratifications
- 18 signatures
- 4 declarations of acceptance

- 28 articles
- Includes **all** major space-faring nations
- Effectively being used?
- Yes!

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State Responsibility vs Liability

RESPONSIBILITY

(Article VI of the Outer Space Treaty)

- **Who:** The *State* (even for private actors under its jurisdiction)
- **About:** *Conduct:* how space activities are carried out (.g. using space assets for armed attacks)
- **Triggered by:** *Breach of international law* (e.g. failure to authorize/supervise, breach of UN Charter)
- **Consequence:** *International responsibility:* State must explain or correct behaviour (stop any act against international law)

You did something wrong — fix it!

LIABILITY

(Article VII of the Outer Space Treaty + Liability Convention)

- **Who:** The *launching State* (the one that launches, procures the launch, or whose territory/facilities are used)
- **About:** *Consequences:* actual *damage caused* by a space object (to what?)
- **Triggered by:** ***Damage*** (even if no legal breach occurred)
- **Consequence:** *Pay compensation*
- **Standard of Liability:**
  - **Absolute liability:** for damage *on Earth or to aircraft in flight*
  - **Fault-based liability:** for damage *in outer space*

If you cause the damage, you cover the cost!

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To be liable, you need to be considered a launching state

Defined in:
Article VII of the *Outer Space Treaty* and Article I of the *Liability Convention*

Launching State = Any State that:

1. **Launches** a space object
2. **Procures the launch** (pays or arranges it)
3. **Allows a launch from its territory**
4. **Allows a launch from its facility**

In practice:

- ✓ More than one State can qualify → *joint launching States*
- ✓ All launching States are **jointly and severally liable** for any damage caused *(i.e. all can be held fully responsible, then sort it out among themselves)*

💬 **Example:**

- A satellite built by France, launched from the US, on a rocket owned by a private company:
  both **France and the US** are launching States.
- If it crashes in Canada → Canada claims compensation from either or both.

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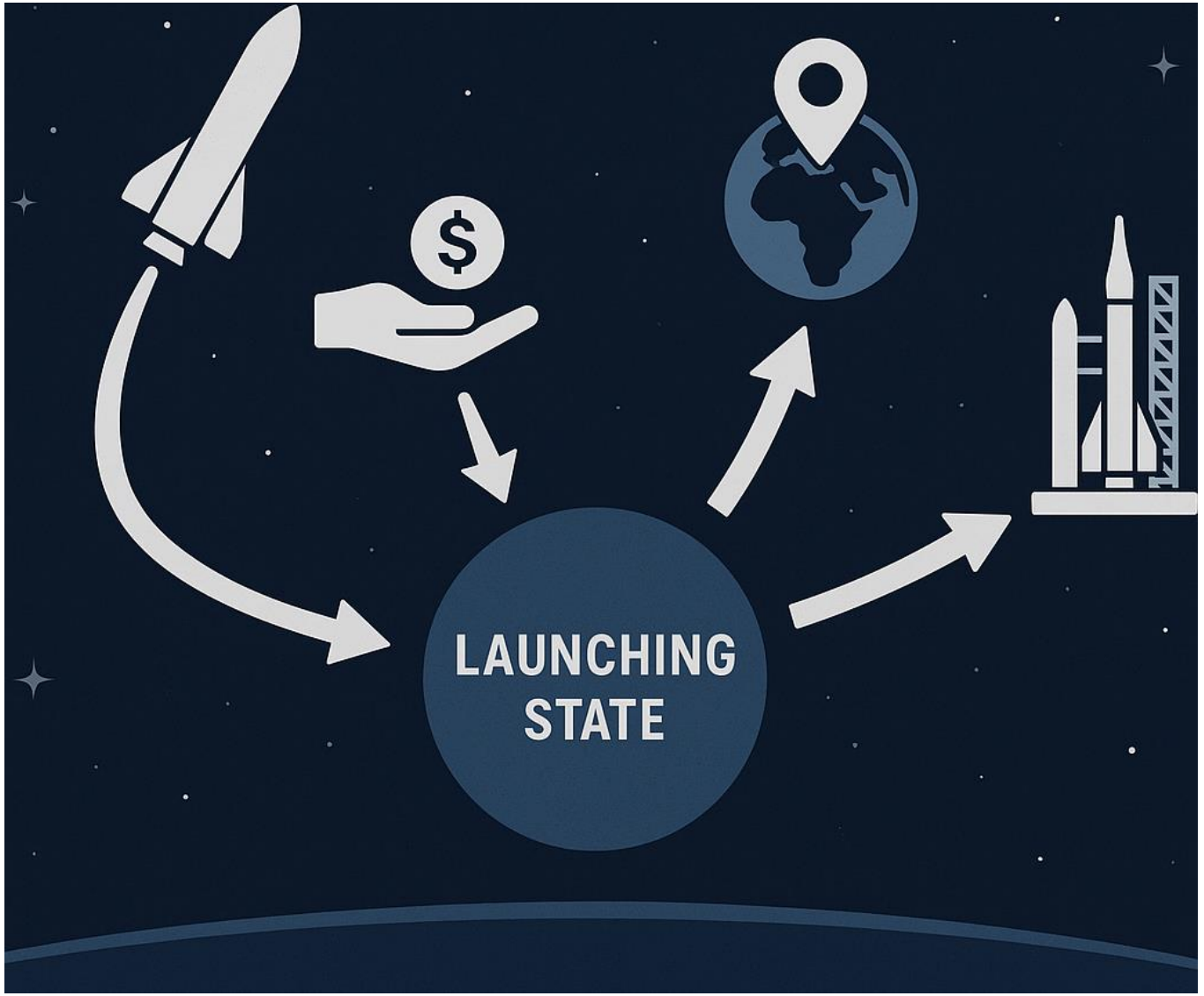
Who is a launching state and why is this important?



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Types and Scope of Liability

(Articles II–III, Liability Convention)

If your object falls and causes harm, you pay — no excuses.

Absolute Liability: on Earth
For damage caused *on the surface of the Earth* or *to aircraft in flight*
Launching State is **automatically liable:**
no need to prove fault
Based on the idea that space activities are *inherently risky!*

*In orbit, **mistakes** matter: not mere accidents*

Fault-Based Liability: in Outer Space
For damage *elsewhere than on Earth*
(e.g. satellite collisions)
Liability only if **fault** (negligence or error) is proven
•eflects shared operational risk among space actors.

Exoneration (Article VI)
No liability if:
- Victim's gross negligence or intent caused the damage
- Action was mandated by the UN Security Council to maintain peace

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Fault based or absolute?





Fault Based Liability

Absolute Liability

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What counts as damage?



- **Damage includes:**

✓ **To persons:** injury or death

✓ **To property:** destruction or loss on Earth or in airspace

✓ **To space objects:** when caused by another object (in orbit)

- **Examples:**

✓ A launch failure causes rocket debris to hit a populated area.

✓ A falling stage contaminates farmland.

✓ A satellite collision creates fragments that destroy another payload.

How Claims Work

When damage occurs:

1 **Diplomatic channel:** The injured State files a claim against the launching State through diplomatic means (within 1 year).

2 **Negotiation first:** Parties try to settle amicably.

3 **If no agreement:** A **Claims Commission** is established (3 members — one nominated by each State, one neutral chair).

4 **Outcome:** Commission issues a *decision or recommendation* (non-binding unless both agree otherwise).

5 **Compensation:** Covers the *actual damage:* not punitive damages.

A structured, peaceful way to settle space accidents: not a court, but a diplomatic mechanism.

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UNOOSA's Other Mandates

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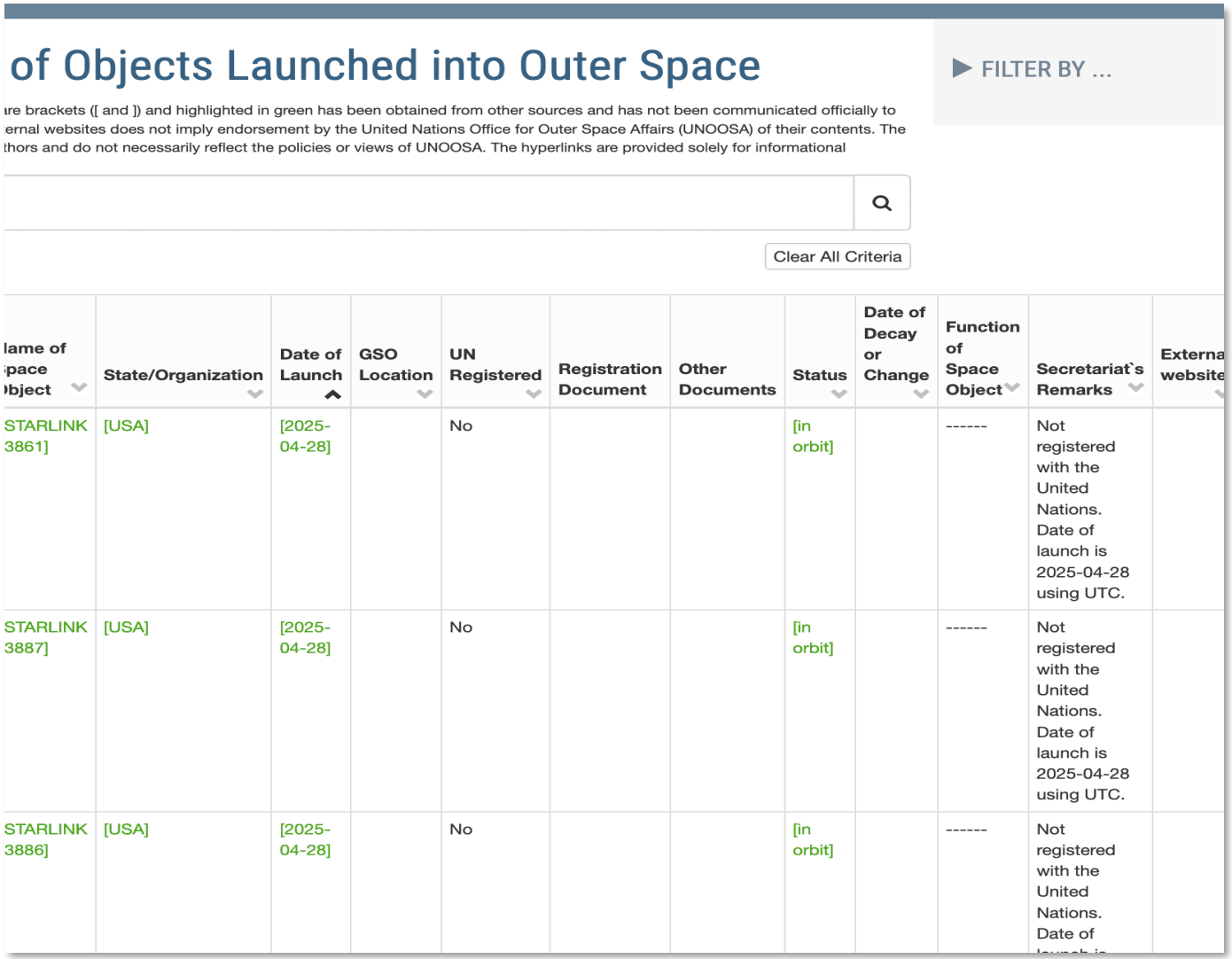
Register of Objects Launched Into Outer Space.

Registration of Space Objects



of Objects Launched into Outer Space

FILTER BY ...

are brackets ([and]) and highlighted in green has been obtained from other sources and has not been communicated officially to ernal websites does not imply endorsement by the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) of their contents. The thors and do not necessarily reflect the policies or views of UNOOSA. The hyperlinks are provided solely for informational

Clear All Criteria

lame of pace bject	State/Organization	Date of Launch	GSO Location	UN Registered	Registration Document	Other Documents	Status	Date of Decay or Change	Function of Space Object	Secretariat`s Remarks	Externa website
STARLINK 3861]	[USA]	[2025-04-28]		No			[in orbit]		------	Not registered with the United Nations. Date of launch is 2025-04-28 using UTC.	
STARLINK 3887]	[USA]	[2025-04-28]		No			[in orbit]		------	Not registered with the United Nations. Date of launch is 2025-04-28 using UTC.	
STARLINK 3886]	[USA]	[2025-04-28]		No			[in orbit]		------	Not registered with the United Nations. Date of	

The Launching State shall register its space objects

States are to establish a national registry in order to:

- Retain jurisdiction and control
- Retain ownership rights in space objects and
- Gain the right for the object's return

Notification of each object upon launch to UNOOSA

United Nations
Office for Outer Space Affairs

Satellite launched into Earth orbit and beyond

Notifications under the Registration Convention or GA resolution 1721B (XVI) in 2024 Registered functional

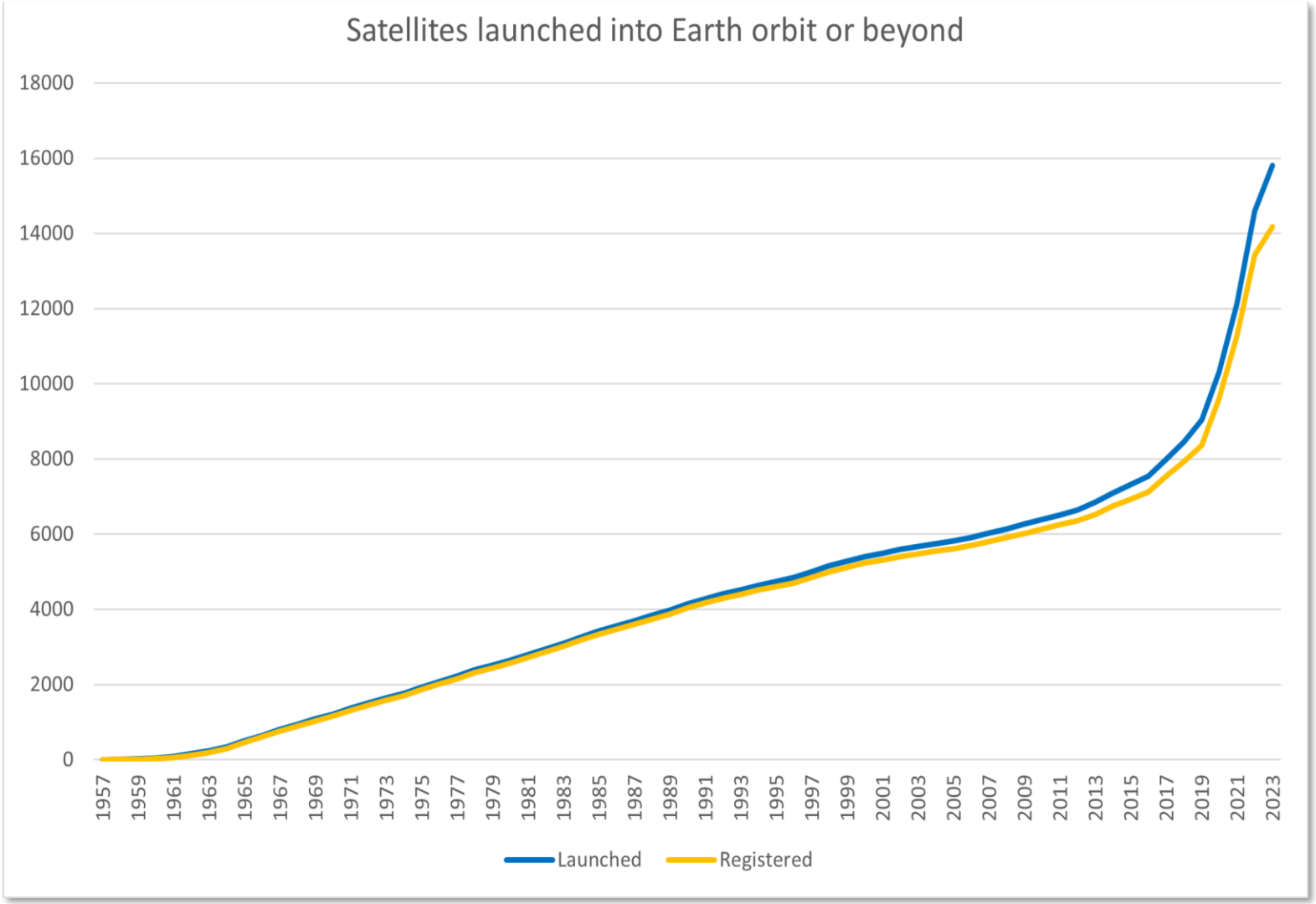
- Space Objects:

  2025: ~ 2,636

  2024: ~ 2,395

- Space Object re-entry notifications:

  2025: ~ 1000



United Nations
Office for Outer Space Affairs



The Global Space Law Project

The Global Space Law Project



Mandate:

"Requests UNOOSA to assist countries in developing national space laws and policies in line with international space law."

i.e. Resolution on the 50th Anniversary of the Outer Space Treaty; Space2030 Agenda Resolution and annual resolutions on International Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, which collectively emphasize the importance of helping countries develop national space laws in line with international standards

The Global Space Law Project

Space Law Technical Advisory Missions

Tailored legal and policy assistance to help countries in drafting, finalising and implementing their national space law/policy, ensuring alignment with international space law frameworks

Key Objective

- Provide legal expertise for MS to draft and implement national space laws, policies and regulation.
- Promote adherence to int. space law and internationally recognized principles fostering a safe and sustainable outer space activities.
- Encourage global collaboration among spacefaring and emerging nations.



Impact



Kenya

Gaps Identifying Exercise 2023

Advised on refining their draft space law; currently public consultations, ongoing leading to final adoption



Philippines

Treaty Ratification and REG

2022: Supported ratification of the REG Convention; all 9 satellites are registered with the UN, and a national registry is in place

2024: Assisted in benefits of ratifying LIAB and identifying regulator to start drafting process



Chile

Space Policy

Ongoing TAMs since 2020: Assisted in drafting national space policy, second policy to be adopted very soon. Encouraged steps towards a national space law in TAM 2024.

Other Capacity Building Tools

ASTRO Database

ASTRO
ACCESSING SPACE TREATY RESOURCES ONLINE

ASTRO Database: collection of national laws and policies

The objective is:

1. Raise global awareness about and adherence to the five UN Space Treaties and additional non-binding instruments relevant to international space law
2. Share best practices
3. Foster the development of national legislation and policy related to space activities

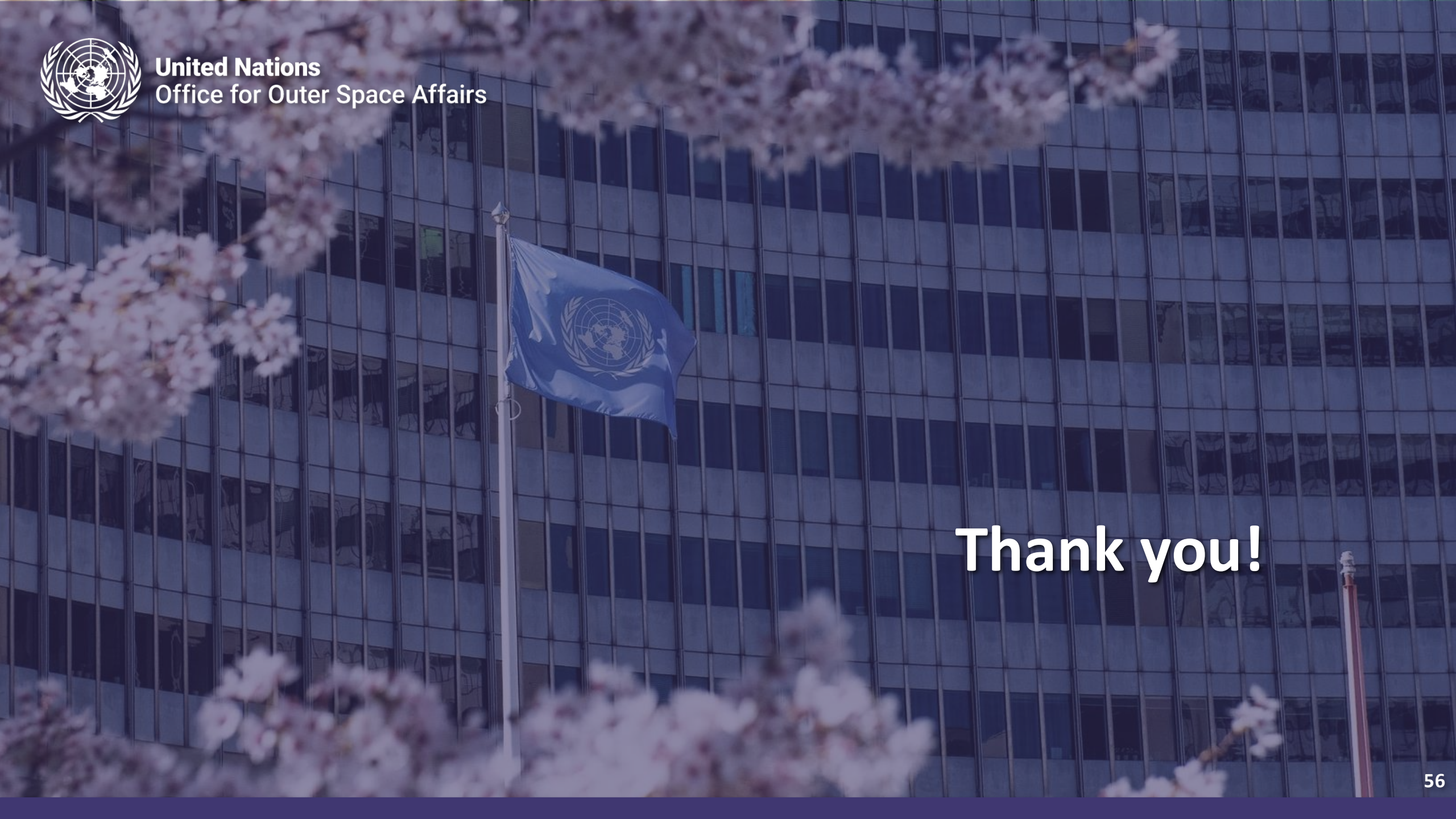
https://astro.unoosa.org/astro

E-Learning Courses



E-learning modules:

- Four modules on various aspects of space law
- Space Economy
- LTS-Guidelines
- Open access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Thank you!