



Promoting Cooperative Solutions for Space Sustainability

United Nations
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The Future of Space Security: Framing the Development of TCBMs in Multilateral Fora

Report

The Secure World Foundation (SWF) and the United Nations Institute on Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) co-hosted a side event entitled “*The Future of Space Security: Framing the Development of TCBMs in Multilateral Fora*” on Thursday, October 18, 2012, at the United Nations (UN) Headquarters in New York. The event took place alongside the recent meetings of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) First and Fourth Committees and featured a panel of speakers discussing the work being done at the international level on transparency and confidence building measures (TCBMs) for outer space activities. The speakers, representing a cross-section of government and academic experts, exchanged their views before a capacity crowd.

First, Mr Victor Vasiliev, Chairman of the UN Group of Governmental Experts on Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures in Outer Space Activities (GGE), reported on the progress achieved during the first of three meetings of the GGE, held in New York from July 23 to 27, 2012. At the request of the UNGA First Committee, the UN Secretary-General charged this group – comprised of experts nominated by the governments of Brazil, Chile, China, France, Italy, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, the Republic of Korea, Romania, the Russian Federation, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Ukraine, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America – to investigate the present state of TCBMs in outer space. The GGE’s objective is to produce a comprehensive report aimed at improving international cooperation on space security and reducing the risk of misunderstanding and miscommunication among States through transparency and confidence building measures. Mr Vasiliev reported that the GGE had agreed to work through consensus and on its tentative work schedule. In particular, he stressed that the GGE would be engaging in a concerted outreach effort to engage with the international space and security communities in order to draw upon as much expertise as possible in fulfillment of its mandate. He stated that the GGE would welcome written recommendations from intergovernmental bodies, industry and private sector, civil society, and other Member States not already represented in the group.

Next, Mr. Richard Buenneke, Co-Chair of Expert Group B of the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space Working Group on the Long Term Sustainability of Outer Space (LTSSA), discussed the work being carried out on the topic, “*Space Debris, Space Operations and Tools to Support Collaborative Space Situational Awareness.*” He noted that Expert Group B was working toward identification of best practice guidelines that could help address issues such as information exchange on orbital conjunctions and collision avoidance. Mr. Buenneke also pointed out that there are plans for all four expert groups of the UN COPUOS Scientific and Technical Subcommittee to meet and address topics of overlap.

Mr. Duncan Blake, Legal Advisor for the Defence Space Coordinating Office at the Department of Defence of Australia, speaking in his personal capacity, addressed the interest of new space actors, such as Australia, and their expectations of TCBMs. Mr. Blake focused on how TCBMs might reduce the possibility of space turning into an even more sharply contested domain by helping to implement existing rules of international law. He particularly focused on how States might constructively communicate the “intent” behind their national space activities to increase confidence and trust in the international community.

Dr. Joan Johnson-Freese, Professor of National Security Affairs at the US Naval War College, also speaking in her personal capacity, discussed the national security interests that may impact the development of TCBMs. She emphasized the importance of perception in space security issues and of tamping down sensationalized interpretations of space activities. In terms of space sustainability, she noted that this was one area where all parties involved, including spacefaring and non-spacefaring States, agree that steps need to be taken to preserve space-based global utilities such as space-based internet access and navigation systems. However, because States were divided on how to proceed, particularly in respect to the development of legally-binding treaties, a voluntary instrument might be the next best means to making progress towards long-term sustainability in outer space. In this context, she was encouraged by the renewed efforts to develop TCBMs in multilateral fora such as UNCOPUOS and the GGE.

Finally, Dr. Bharath Gopaldaswamy, Visiting Associate Director of the Program in Arms Control for Disarmament & International Security at the University of Illinois, addressed the technical aspects of TCBMs and how technology plays a role in States’ decision-making processes. He stressed that the role of TCBMs would, ultimately, depend on making States feel more comfortable in the sharing of sensitive information, which would lead to ensuring long-term



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sustainability in space. He added that one of the principal hurdles to address was the dual use nature of space technology, referring to the civilian and military capabilities of space assets, and that means of securely sharing data about such technology would play an important role in the TCBM negotiations ahead.

Together, the panelists' remarks demonstrated the importance of pursuing and developing TCBMs in important international fora like the UNGA First and Fourth Committees. Their presentations indicated that, while progress has been made, more work must be done to ensure these TCBMs are as inclusive as possible, capture current best practices in safe space operations, respect existing international law, reflect national security interests, and are founded in technical realities. If these objectives are accomplished in the current work towards TCBMs for space, the international community will be closer to the ultimate goal of space security and sustainability.

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