

UNISPACE III

Promotion of International Cooperation

Introduction

The General Assembly, in its resolution 52/56 of 10 December 1997, agreed to convene the Third United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peace-

ful Uses of Outer Space (UNISPACE III) at the United Nations Office at Vienna from 19 to 30 July 1999.

Many countries came to realise that UNISPACE III would serve as an ideal forum to construct a practical,

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well-defined framework within which global society could maximize the benefits of space science and technology through international cooperation in space activities in the years ahead.

UNISPACE III attracted the participation of high-level government officials and policy makers from Member States, including heads of space agencies, as well as representatives of intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations. The Conference was also attended by senior executives of space-related industry.

One of the key objectives of the Meeting, was to identify specific areas and actions through which space and science technology can help solve common problems of regional or global significance. Examples of such problems are natural disasters, environmental degradation, climate change, outbreak of vector-borne diseases and



under-development of rural and remote areas. To achieve that objective, UNISPACE III also considered ways of expediting the use of space applications by countries to promote sustainable development. Special attention was given on how to maximize the use of space technology in implementing recommendations in Agenda 21.

It is accepted that greater understanding and use of space science and technology could assist in stimulating economic and social development, especially in developing countries. Another key objective of the Conference therefore, was to strengthen the capabilities of countries, particularly developing countries, in using space applications for economic, social and cultural development. To this end, the Conference addressed various issues related to education, training and technical assistance in space science and technology and their applications. In advance of the Conference, developing countries, in particular, had been encouraged to define their needs for space applications for development purposes.

UNISPACE III also strove to increase awareness of the general public of the benefits of space technology; and ways and means to strengthen further international cooperation in space activities were identified at the Conference.

Opening of the Conference

Following the official opening and the establishment of the committees and election of officers, a general exchange of views was held, during which statements by Member States were limited to 10 minutes.

The statement on behalf of the G-77 and China recalled that the decision to hold this conference was taken

by the UN General Assembly under the theme "Space benefits for humanity in the 21st century." The speaker noted that the Group "is concerned about the continuing use of outer space for military or military-related activities...(and)...there is urgent need for demilitarisation of outer space and reduction in military activities, as clearly stated in United Nations General Assembly Resolution 53/76. The amount reserved for these activities, or at least part thereof, may be used for enhancing sustainable economic development of the developing countries through peaceful uses of outer space."

Many other speakers also voiced their concern on military-related activities in outer space.

Work in Committee I

The Conference allocated to Committee I the consideration of agenda items 7, 9, 10 and 12.

"Status of the Scientific Knowledge of Earth and its Environment."

Discussions covered the latest scientific understanding of the nature and characteristics of climate change, highlighting information from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change; the state of the environment, with emphasis on broad-scale changes in land use and land cover, atmospheric pollution and related issues (including the latest understanding of ozone), availability of and changes in surface water and related topics; and the state of knowledge on weather forecasting, atmospheric dynamics and severe storms.

The report of the Committee notes that the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and its Legal Subcommittee are currently considering the question of the review and possible revision of the principles relevant to the use of nuclear power sources in outer space; matters relating to the definition and delimitation of outer space and to the character and utilization of the geostationary orbit, including consideration of ways and means to ensure the rational and equitable use of the geostationary orbit, without prejudice to the role of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU); and a review of the status of the five international legal instruments governing outer space.

The report stresses that "it is important to highlight the developments in dealing with some of these topics, for example relative to the geostationary orbit, in the light of the recommendations by UNISPACE 82, that have been reflected in legal instruments developed in other bodies in the United Nations system. This is true for ITU with regard to the implementation of guaranteed equitable access in accordance with what has been established in international conferences and in the constitution and norms of ITU. It is also true for the progress that has been made in studying the topics on the basis of recent proposals and agreements in the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, in particular regarding the assertion that the geostationary orbit is an integral part of outer space."

The report states that since UNISPACE 82, the world has witnessed a considerable growth in the commercialisation and privatisation of space-related activities. That trend has led to significant increases in the number of non-state actors involved in the exploration and use of outer space, as well as the number of different activities in which they are engaged. Activities such as space tourism, the mining of asteroids and other celestial bodies and waste disposal in outer space are being seriously considered as possibilities for private space enterprise in the not too distant future. These activities have given rise to new legal challenges.

The report recommends that

“The Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space should give attention to the various aspects of space debris. ... (It) should also consider the legal issues regarding low-Earth orbits (LEOs), taking into account recent changes in the ITU convention concerning the status of LEOs as limited natural resources. The issue of security of ownership regarding spacecraft should be addressed.”

“The Member States should consider the development of effective mechanisms for the settlement of disputes arising in relation to space commercialisation. Those mechanisms should take into account existing arbitration rules used in international practice for dispute settlement.”

“The Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space should analyse the desirability of drafting new legal instruments relating to various space applications, taking into particular account the commercial growth of some of these applications.”

“The Legal Subcommittee and the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee should in general meet in such a way that there can be more interaction involving the work of those two bodies.”

“The Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space should also consider legal and other aspects relevant to GNSS.” (Global navigation satellite systems)

Specific Action Programmes

The Committee noted, *inter alia*, that there is a need to look at innovative solutions to meet space technology and applications in support of developing countries. In this regard, some proposals had been put forward, which the Committee said needed further study and definition.

Further, Member States should be encouraged to control pollution of the sky by light and other causes, for the benefit of energy conservation, the natural environment, night-time safety and comfort and the national economy, as well as science.

The report notes that *“More attention should be paid to the protection of intellectual property rights, in view of the growth in the commercialization and privatization of space-related activities. However, the protection and enforcement of intellectual property rights should be considered together with the international legal principles developed by the United Nations in the form of treaties and declarations, such as those relating to the prin-*

... ciple of non-appropriation of outer space, as well as other relevant international conventions.”

“The feasibility of harmonizing international intellectual property standards and legislation relating to intellectual property rights in outer space should be further explored with a view to enhancing international co-ordination and cooperation at the level of both the State and the private sector...”

Under agenda item 9, “Benefits of basic space science and capacity building,” participants discussed the report of the Space Generation Forum, containing its recommendations for consideration by the Conference for inclusion in its report.

In December 1997, The Secretariat invited the International Space University to organise a youth forum as part of UNISPACE III. The International Space University then solicited alumni volunteers to plan, organise and conduct the Space Generation Forum, in parallel with other UNISPACE III activities.

The 160 participants of the Forum were from 60 States. Participants were encouraged to think in terms of a broader perspective, encompassing all humanity, and to disregard national agenda. All participants spoke



Courtesy: Financial Times

only as concerned individuals, guided by their conscience and a belief in the power of space to change humanity in positive ways.

The meetings of the Forum were conducted in three parallel sessions. On each day, all of the small discussion groups within each parallel session put forward recommendations, from which about five were chosen; thus, a total of 49 recommendations were chosen during the Forum, contained in document A/CONF.184/L.8 and Corr. 1. The participants were asked to choose the 10 best recommendations and after a brief discussion, consensus was achieved concerning the selection of the 10 recommendations. (A/CONF.184/C.1/L.11 and Corr.1). ➤

Work in Committee II

The Conference allocated the consideration of agenda items 8 and 11 to Committee II.

Status and Applications of Space Science and Technology (agenda item 8)

In reviewing items 8 (a) to (c), special attention was paid to the scientific and technological developments that have taken place, taking into account the interests of all countries, in particular developing countries, with regard to global, regional and national issues.

Protecting the Environment: Environment and Natural Resources and Remote Sensing

The Committee's report states that there should be a wider and more effective communication of the lessons learned on the use of Earth observation for sustainable development in developing countries and notes that the economic growth rate of the developing regions will be significantly accelerated by affordable telecommunication services.

The Committee recommends that measures should be taken to maximize the benefit of remote sensing systems through increased availability and affordability of data and information products; improved provision of technical information, training and financial support for developing countries, in order to assist in decision-making and the use of remote sensing data and derived information in the development process; and improved coordination among ongoing and planned programmes and initiatives to eliminate duplicated efforts and to identify gaps.

Economic and Societal Benefits (agenda item 11)

The report notes that other major beneficiaries from space technology investments and spin-offs include

transportation, environmental monitoring, public safety and computer and information technology sectors, including various aspects of sustainable development.

For developing countries, relevant space-related technologies can be used to address social and economic problems effectively. It adds that, however, "a number of significant barriers to the transfer of such technologies exist and would need to be surmounted in order for those countries to take full advantage of the benefits that could result from them."

Activities of the Technical Forum

The Technical Forum was an integral part of UNISPACE III. It consisted of 38 seminars, workshops, symposia, scientific and technical forums, round tables and panel discussions. Its purpose was to examine in detail various issues of space science, technology and law related to the six substantive items on the agenda of the Conference. Each of the items was covered by several activities at the Technical Forum. Immediately following the completion of each activity, all conclusions and proposals that emanated from it were summarized and submitted to the relevant committee of the Conference for consideration by Member States. Those conclusions and proposals made a significant contribution to the final report of the Conference.

Adoption of the Reports

Following the adoption of the reports of the Committees, the Conference on 30 July also formally adopted the Vienna Declaration and Action Plan. (MJ)