

# UNCOPUOS LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY OF SPACE ACTIVITIES WORKING GROUP FACT SHEET

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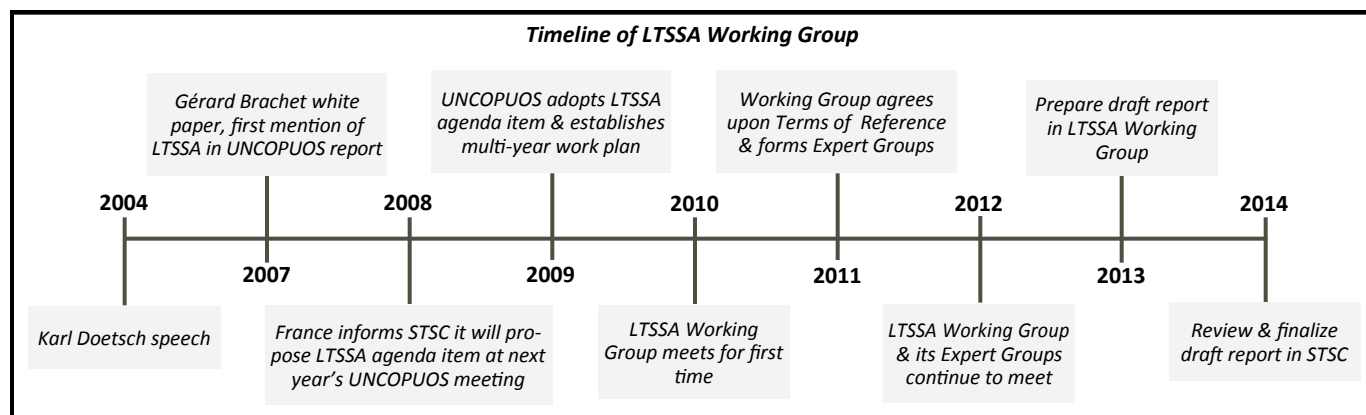
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*The Long-term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities Working Group is an initiative under the UNCOPUOS Scientific and Technical Subcommittee tasked with producing a consensus report outlining voluntary best practice guidelines for all space actors to ensure the long-term sustainable use of outer space.*

## History and Background

The Long-term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities (LTSSA) Working Group is an initiative under the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee (STSC) of the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNCOPUOS). The LTSSA Working Group's goal is to examine and propose measures to ensure the safe and sustainable use of outer space for peaceful purposes and the benefit of all countries. It will produce a consensus report outlining voluntary best practice guidelines for space.

The long-term sustainability of space activities topic has been discussed within the UNCOPUOS framework since 2004, when then-chair Karl Doetsch delivered a speech on the topic. In 2007, then-chair Gérard Brachet contributed a white paper on the topic to the committee. The following year, the French delegation announced its plan to submit an official proposal to UNCOPUOS to add a sustainability item to the agenda. This led to the establishment of an official working group under the chairmanship of South African Peter Martinez<sup>1</sup> in 2010. The Working Group Terms of Reference (TOR) were finalized in 2011. In the same year, the Working Group formed four expert groups to discuss certain topics relevant to long-term space sustainability. The timeline below summarizes the history and work plan of the LTSSA Working Group.



## Focus and Structure

According to its TOR,<sup>2</sup> which define objectives, scope, and organization, the LTSSA Working Group will examine the long-term sustainability of space activities in the broader context of sustainable development on Earth; consider current practices, operating procedures, technical standards, and policies relevant to space sustainability and safety; and take as its legal framework the existing UN treaties and principles governing State space activities. It aims to identify areas of concern to space sustainability;

examine and propose measures that could enhance all aspects of sustainability; and prepare a report containing a consolidated set of best practices that could be applied voluntarily by States, international organizations, national non-governmental organizations, and the private sector. In addition to a focus on how space supports sustainable development on Earth, the TOR emphasizes equitable access to the space domain for all actors.

The LTSSA Working Group has a multi-year work plan for the period 2011-2014. During 2011, the STSC agreed upon TOR. Each expert group (explained below) met in 2012 to determine scope of work, develop outlines, and define writing assignments. In 2013, the expert groups prepared draft reports with the goal of submitting a consolidated report to the STSC in 2014. The current schedule calls for the STSC to review and finalize the report during its 51<sup>st</sup> session in 2014 with the intent of presenting to the full Committee the following June. The LTSSA Working Group and expert groups meet formally during and/or on the margins of COPUOS meetings and informally at space-related conferences throughout the year.

Inputs were invited from other UN bodies, such as the Conference on Disarmament and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), and non-UN intergovernmental bodies, such as the Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee (IADC) and the International Academy of Astronautics (IAA). After much debate, it was agreed that non-governmental organization (NGO) and private sector inputs are welcome if submitted through a State delegation.

In 2011, four expert groups were formed to examine specific topics. State delegations or intergovernmental bodies with permanent observer status at COPUOS can nominate non-governmental experts to these groups as a part of their official delegation.<sup>3</sup> The group topics and chairs are listed below.

- A – Sustainable space utilization supporting sustainable development on Earth; co-chaired by Portugal and Mexico
- B – Space debris, space operations, and tools to support space situational awareness sharing; co-chaired by Italy and the United States
- C – Space weather; co-chaired by Japan and Canada
- D – Regulatory regimes and guidance for new actors in the space arena; co-chaired by Australia and Italy

## Current Status and Issues of Concern

The LTSSA Working Group is progressing, but it is likely that the Working Group will require an additional year to complete its report. Other issues surround the process. First, there was disagreement over the extent to which private sector and non-governmental entities should be involved in the process. Many felt the Working Group was, in part, created to learn from industry and civil society best practices. Other Member States felt very strongly about adhering to the State-centric format of the UN system. In the end, a compromise was made that these entities could participate indirectly through a Member State delegation. Additionally, a workshop was held during the fiftieth session of the STSC to enable further non-State stakeholder participation.

A second issue is the debate over what constitutes “best practices.” Some participants feel that only existing space activities should be considered; while others would like to examine potential future challenges. There has also been discussion about whether a best practice is a goal to be achieved or a preferred way of accomplishing a goal. The four Expert Groups have made substantive progress on draft best practice guidelines, which the Chair has compiled into one document (A/AC.105/C.1/2013/CRP.23).<sup>4</sup> While these are very much draft guidelines, they reflect the fragmentary nature and lack of unity some feared.

A third issue surrounding the LTSSA Working Group is how it should interface with other international initiatives or bodies also working on space sustainability. The Working Group has recognized the need to coordinate with these other efforts, specifically mentioning the Conference on Disarmament, the ITU, and the UN General Assembly Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on Transparency and Confidence-building Measures for Space Activities. As part of the effort to facilitate harmonization among these complementary initiatives, the Chair of the UN Group of Governmental Experts on Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures in Outer Space Activities presented at the third meeting of the LTSSA Working Group, providing an update of the work taking place in the GGE. In recent meetings, discussion has also mentioned the proposed International Code of Conduct for Space Activities. The TOR state that the Working Group “should avoid duplicating the work being done within these international entities and should identify areas of concern relating to the long-term sustainability of outer space activities that are not being covered by them.”<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the Working Group acknowledges the need to clarify how the UN COPUOS Legal Subcommittee will be involved in this process.

## Endnotes

1. Report from the 53rd session of UN COPUOS to the 65th session of the UN General Assembly, Supplement No. 20 (A/65/20), 2010. Pp. 21.
2. Report from the 54th session of UN COPUOS to the 66th session of the UN General Assembly, Supplement No. 20 (A/66/20), 2011. Pp. 51-57.
3. Secure World Foundation participates in all of these expert groups through the U.S. delegation.
4. Online at [http://www.oosa.unvienna.org/pdf/limited/c1/AC105\\_C1\\_2013\\_CRP23E.pdf](http://www.oosa.unvienna.org/pdf/limited/c1/AC105_C1_2013_CRP23E.pdf)
5. Report from the 54th..., 55.