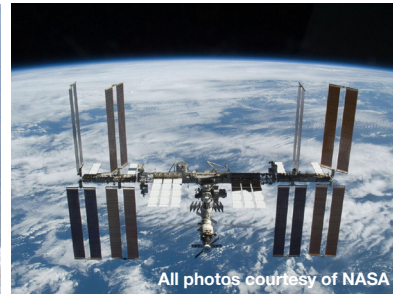# An *International Code of Conduct for Outer Space Activities*: Strengthening Long-Term Sustainability, Stability, Safety, and Security in Space

All photos courtesy of NASA

"The United States…calls on all nations to work together to adopt approaches for responsible activity in space to preserve this right for the benefit of future generations."

– President Barack Obama, National Space Policy, June 28, 2010

Benefits of Space Systems

Space is vital to protecting U.S. economic prosperity and the national security interests of the United States, its allies, and partners. The benefits derived from space-based systems permeate almost every aspect of our daily life. The utilization of space helps by: warning of natural disasters; facilitating navigation and transportation globally; expanding our scientific frontiers; providing national decision makers with global communications, command, and control; monitoring strategic and military developments as well as supporting treaty monitoring and arms control verification; providing global access to financial operations; and scores of other activities worldwide. However, space, a domain that no nation owns but on which all rely, is becoming increasingly congested and contested.

Space Congestion

Today there are approximately 60 nations and government consortia that operate satellites, as well as numerous commercial and academic satellite operators, creating an environment that is increasingly congested. The Department of Defense tracks roughly 22,000 objects in orbit, of which 1,100 are active satellites. There are hundreds of thousands of additional objects too small to track but still capable of damaging satellites in orbit and the International Space Station. We need to work with the international community to address hazards and concerns that have arisen from this increasingly congested space environment.

Threats to Space

The threats to the space environment will increase as more nations and non-state actors develop and deploy counter-space systems. Today space systems and their supporting infrastructure face a range of man-made threats that may deny, degrade, deceive, disrupt, or destroy assets. Irresponsible acts against space systems will have implications beyond the space environment, disrupting worldwide services upon which civil, commercial, and national security sectors depend. Given the increasing threat—through either irresponsible or unintentional acts—to the long-term *sustainability, stability, safety, and security* of space operations, we must work with the community of spacefaring nations to preserve the space environment for all nations and future generations.

An International Code of Conduct for Outer Space Activities

In response to these challenges, the United States reached a decision to formally work with the European Union and spacefaring nations to develop and advance an *International Code of Conduct for Outer Space Activities*. The European Union's draft Code of Conduct is a good foundation for the development of a non-legally binding International Code of Conduct focused on the use of voluntary and pragmatic transparency and confidence-building measures to help prevent mishaps, misperceptions, and mistrust in space. An International Code of Conduct, if adopted, would establish guidelines for responsible behavior to reduce the hazards of debris-generating events and increase the transparency of operations in space to avoid the danger of collisions.

Protecting National and Economic Security

The Obama Administration is committed to ensuring that an International Code enhances national security and maintains the United States' inherent right of individual and collective self-defense, a fundamental part of international law. The United States would only subscribe to such a Code of Conduct if it protects and enhances the national and economic security of the United States, our allies, and our friends. The Administration is committed to keeping the U.S. Congress informed as our consultations with the spacefaring community progress.