

UK General Statement, Scientific and Technical Sub-Committee of COPUOS

Chair, Distinguished Delegates

The Delegation of the United Kingdom is pleased to have the opportunity to share with you the progress and developments we have made since the last meeting of this sub-committee.

In March 2018, the Space Industry Bill received Royal Assent. This bill was a cross-Government activity to establish the primary legislation, which would allow commercial small-satellite launch from the UK. Over the past two years the UK Space Agency, along with its partners, has been developing detailed secondary legislation and guidance ranging from safety to liability. The UK continues to use international best practice to inform these ongoing activities, and looks forward to engaging with other commercial-launch regulators, as we approach our first launches in the coming years.

Currently, the UK Outer Space Act is the basis for licensing space activities operated from the UK and, since the last Scientific and Technical Sub-committee, we have licensed 15 missions. Space activities are becoming increasingly more complex and, as space becomes more accessible, a wider range of organisations are now applying for licenses. We recognise not only the benefits of these new missions, but also the need to responsibly regulate them.

An example of the new type of missions that are being licensed from the UK is the constellation being developed by OneWeb. In February 2019, the first six spacecraft of the OneWeb constellation were successfully launched on a Soyuz rocket from French Guiana, representing the start of a planned constellation of close to 600 satellites. As similar systems start to be deployed, near-term safety and long-term sustainability must be assessed, and we are grateful for the Inter-Agency Debris Coordination Committee in developing recommendations on large constellations to guide our decision making processes.

In concert with our work on launch, the UK has initiated regulatory reform in support of our in-orbit activities. The new regulatory framework is being guided by international and industry best practice, and reflects the UK's strong commitment to the implementation of Long Term Sustainability guidelines, which ensure the promotion of safe operational practices and a sustainable environment into the future.

The United Kingdom acknowledges the important work of the IADC, currently working under the very able chairmanship of Laurent Francillout of CNES. We value and support the important research that the IADC offers and recognise it as a unique forum for world leading experts to collaborate and develop a common understanding of the sustainable-use of the Earth's orbit. We look forward to IADC's technical presentation during this session of the sub-

committee, and to applying IADC's recommendations when licensing future UK space missions under our national regulatory framework.

In November last year, the UK reaffirmed its commitment to international collaboration of space missions and the development of new technologies through a 15% increase in its annual funding for ESA. A notable example of the successful partnerships within ESA and its member states is the upcoming Solar Orbiter mission, due for launch on the 7th February. The Solar Orbiter mission, which was primed in the UK, will perform unprecedented close-up observations of the Sun, allowing scientists to study the Sun in much more detail than previously possible. The UK looks forward to further collaboration within ESA and contributing to a global vision for the exploration of space.

We continue to push forward the advancement of space technology at the international and national levels. The UK Government is supporting Reaction Engine's revolutionary combined cycle rocket engine, SABRE. The company recently demonstrated the successful operation of its innovative pre-cooler, and the engine now has the potential to both revolutionise access to space, as well as enable technology for other precooled propulsion systems, with a range of commercial applications.

Alongside technological activities, a new National Space Council will be established in the UK later this year. The aim of the National Space Council will be to provide strategic leadership on space across government, coordinating all aspects of the UK's space strategy, investment and use of space through a new National Space Framework.

As the Working Group on the use of nuclear power sources in outer space begins compiling its report, we would like to take the opportunity not only to reinforce our support of the groups work, but to thank Dr Sam Harbison for his long-serving and high-quality leadership of the working group. We look forward to its final recommendations, and next steps, in 2021 for enhancing the safety of nuclear power sources, which play a vital role in the realization of many deep-space missions

The UK welcomes the Committee's adoption of the preamble and 21 guidelines for the long-term sustainability of outer space activities. We encourage States and international inter-governmental organisations to voluntarily take measures, to ensure that the guidelines are implemented to the greatest extent feasible and practicable. The UK is taking practical steps in implementing the guidelines within our regulatory framework and would be happy, and keen, to engage and collaborate with other nations who have similar aspirations. We also look forward to productive discussions on the establishment of a new LTS Working Group to help facilitate the sharing the experiences, practices and lessons learned in guideline implementation.

Recognising the international success that is the 21 guidelines for the Long Term Sustainability of Outer Space activities, the UK is keen to see a new approach on the disarmament agenda. We would like to work with nations to consider how to deal with the emerging threats to space operations and believe that this is best done in the Disarmament Commission and the

Conference on Disarmament.

Threats from nations of weapons placed in space, or based on the earth, or the disruption of critical systems by electronic means, or via energy weapons, should be dealt with under the PAROS (Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space) agenda item and not discussed under COPUOS. In this way, COPUOS can continue to support developing nations to access space, and those already doing so to be responsible operators.

Finally, I wish to make some remarks in relation to the United Kingdom's exit from the EU, which took place on 31 January. As our Ministers have made clear, although the United Kingdom has left the EU, we will not be leaving Europe. We will continue to be friends and partners, especially through our constructive and continued membership of the European Space Agency, COPUOS, the IADC and other multilateral fora.