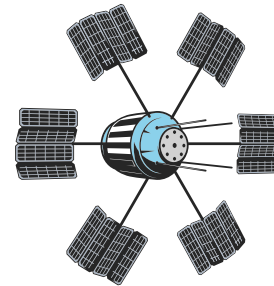


UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE ON THE PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE

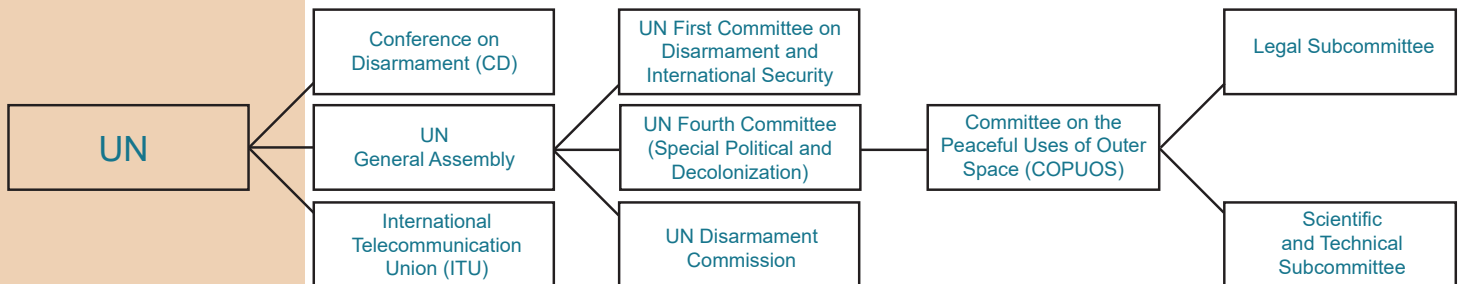
APRIL 2020



ABOUT

The UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UN COPUOS) is one of several bodies associated with the United Nations (UN) that share responsibility for governing the use of outer space.

SPACE GOVERNANCE AT THE UNITED NATIONS



COPUOS was established as an ad hoc committee of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in 1958. In 1959, the UNGA formally established COPUOS “to govern the exploration and use of space for the benefit of all humanity: for peace, security and development.” COPUOS reports to the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly. Its mandate is restricted to issues associated with the peaceful uses of outer space.

WHAT IT DOES

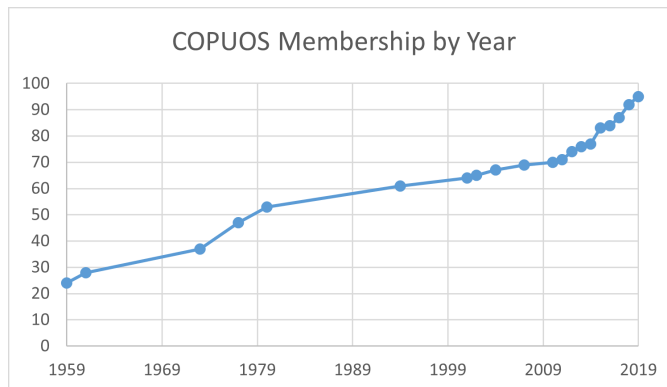
Supported by the UN Office of Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA), COPUOS reviews the scope of international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space, develops relevant UN programs, encourages research and information exchanges on outer-space matters, and studies legal problems arising from the exploration of outer space. It works by consensus.

In addition to developing mechanisms to activities in outer space, COPUOS also provides a platform for states parties to exchange information about national priorities and activities. Such information exchange is a critical transparency and confidence-building measure (TCBM).



MEMBERSHIP

COPUOS began with 18 members, including Canada, in 1958. Over the next 60 years, the number of members grew:



As well, 11 intergovernmental and 30 nongovernmental organizations maintain observer status.

All states with national space agencies belong to COPUOS.

ITS WORK

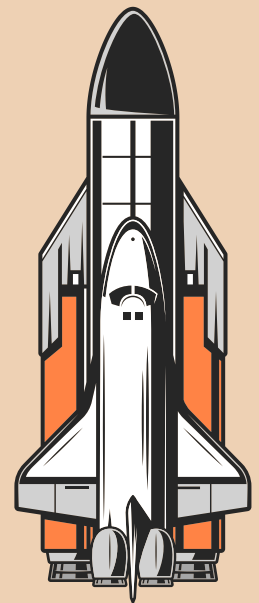
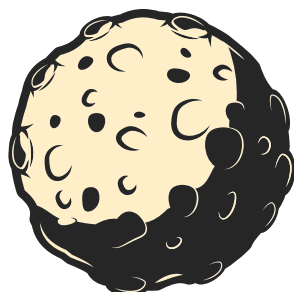
Much of the work of COPUOS takes place in its two standing subcommittees: the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee (STSC) and the Legal Subcommittee (LSC), which meet annually.

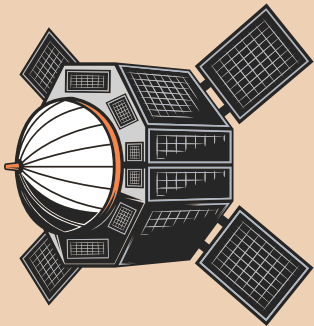
Topics covered in recent years by the STSC include space weather, near-Earth objects, the use of space technology to support socioeconomic development and disaster management, global navigation satellite systems, and the long-term sustainability of outer-space activities. There are working groups on global health and the use of nuclear power sources in outer space.

Issues discussed by the Legal Subcommittee include the definition and delimitation of outer space, national space legislation, legal mechanisms to mitigate space debris, and international mechanisms for cooperation in the peaceful exploration and use of outer space.

In recent years, the LSC has addressed single-issue agenda items in an attempt to respond to emerging space activities in a timely manner. These include the legal aspects of space-traffic management, the application of international law to small-satellite activities, and legal approaches to activities related to the exploitation and utilization of space-based mineral resources.

A longstanding theme in the work of the Committee has been the use of space technology for sustainable development. In 2018, following the 50th anniversary meeting of the UN Conference on the Peaceful Use and Exploration of Outer Space (UNISPACE+50), the General Assembly adopted a resolution inviting the Committee to develop a “Space2030” Agenda and implementation plan linked to UN Frameworks, notably the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Paris Agreement on climate change.





ACHIEVEMENTS

COPUOS has been a key player in the establishment of international law and governance of the peaceful uses of outer space. It has been pivotal in

- the negotiations of the five treaties that are considered to form the basis of international space law, namely the Outer Space Treaty (1967), Astronaut Rescue Agreement (1968), Liability Convention (1972), Registration Convention (1975), and Moon Agreement (1979).
- the development of five sets of non-legally-binding principles and declarations that deal with transnational direct television broadcasting via satellites and remote satellite observations of Earth, regulate the safe use of nuclear power sources necessary for the exploration and use of outer space, and the need to foster international co-operation to support global benefits from space.
- the adoption of space debris mitigation guidelines.
- achieving consensus on an initial set of 21 voluntary guidelines on the Long-Term Sustainability of Space Activities. The guidelines are premised on the idea that the “interests and activities of States and international intergovernmental organizations in outer space, as they have or may have defence and national security implications, should be compatible with preserving outer space for peaceful exploration and use.”

CHALLENGES

COPUOS works by consensus, which ensures that the legal and other voluntary governance measures that it adopts shares the support of all states parties. Such consensus is critical in maintaining a cohesive governance framework in outer space.

However, achieving consensus is a slow and difficult process that can make responding to rapidly changing or contentious situations challenging. The difficulty in achieving consensus can sometimes mean that states opt not to pursue initiatives through the Committee.

Comprehensive governance of the security of outer space is also impeded by the Committee’s narrow focus on peaceful uses. Debate on revisiting the mandate of UN COPUOS to include all issues affecting the peaceful uses of outer space—including those pertaining to military or security uses—has not reached consensus.

RESOURCES

United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA), “Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space,” <https://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/ourwork/copuos/index.html>.

See especially “Working Groups of the Committee and its Subcommittees,” <https://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/ourwork/copuos/working-groups.html>.

Long-term sustainability guidelines: https://www.unoosa.org/res/oosa-doc/data/documents/2018/aac_1052018crp/aac_1052018crp_20_0_html/AC105_2018_CRP20E.pdf.

Space law treaties and principles: <https://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/ourwork/spacelaw/treaties.html>.

Space debris mitigation guidelines https://www.unoosa.org/res/oosadoc/data/documents/2010/stspace/stspace49_0_html/st_space_49E.pdf.

Resolution establishing COPUOS (1472): https://www.unoosa.org/pdf/gares/ARES_14_1472E.pdf.



www.spacesecurityindex.org