

At the last meeting of COPUOS in June 2001, the delegates from China and Russia made statements condemning the US national missile defense (NMD) system. In both cases, they were reminded that COPUOS was not the proper forum to discuss such issues.

Discussions within COPUOS should continue to highlight the "peaceful" aspects of space activities and the common benefits derived there from.

Both the Scientific and Technical and Legal Sub-Committees currently have agenda items of relevance to the CD. Perhaps more importantly, these sub-committees are made up of qualified individuals in the field of space activities and could no doubt contribute valuable information to the CD in areas involving dual-use technologies.

Of prime importance is the establishment of a mechanism to allow a free flow of information between COPUOS and the CD. The Office of Outer Space Affairs (OOSA) which serves as Secretariat to COPUOS could act as coordinator and point of contact for a Special Coordinator to be appointed by the CD.

At the April 2001 meeting of the Scientific and Technical Sub-committee, progress was made on the topic of proliferation and disposal of space debris. The tremendous amount of debris in the geostationary orbit was finally accepted by all members as posing a serious threat to the future use of this limited natural resource. It was pointed out that some of the debris is due to the fact that certain commercial entities exploit a satellite to the utmost thus often depleting the amount of fuel left and making de-orbiting impossible. One thought which will be considered at future meetings of the Scientific and Technical Sub-committee is the possibility of establishing penalties for commercial users who do not de-orbit satellites at the end of their lifetime. Penalties could be linked to licensing approvals.

With this recent development, it is hoped that COPUOS could establish a set of international standards and recommended practices which States would be expected to follow in the interest of preventing environmental pollution.

Calls have also been made to incorporate the current Principles applicable to nuclear power sources (NPS) into a Convention. Coupled with the space debris issue, COPUOS' role would thus highlight the environmental protection aspect of the usage of space as the province of all mankind. Yet these measures could also pave the way towards the elaboration of rules of the road.