

We believe that the "Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, Including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies," which was opened for signature on 27 January 1967, is an excellent starting point for our observations. It is gratifying to see that more than eighty states have already signed this treaty and we strongly urge all states which have not done so yet to accede to it in the near future. As my distinguished colleagues undoubtedly recall, it is only a very short time ago that the ceremonies took place which marked the official coming into effect of the treaty, and we should hope that this solemn affirmation of important principles relating to international co-operation in outer space will give renewed impetus to our efforts to develop practical legal arrangements in respect of such questions as assistance to and return of astronauts and space vehicles, and liability for damage. We must take hope from the points on which agreement has been reached and work to expand these points into a comprehensive set of rules, so that the principles embodied in the treaty may attain their full potential for the orderly and lawful exploration and use of outer space.

In particular the humanitarian aspects of the treaty engage our attention. The tragic deaths of American and Russian astronauts in the past year have underlined again that man's efforts to explore outer space cannot be carried out without risk. We know that everything is done within the power of human ingenuity and foresight to prevent accidents but we have to be prepared for the possibility that, in spite of all precautions, they will occur. It would be unforgiveable if, in the case of accident or emergency, legal or political considerations would prevent the swiftest and most effective possible help within our technological capabilities from being extended to any astronauts or to their vehicles. The treaty describes astronauts as "envoys of mankind" and all mankind has therefore a clear obligation to make every effort to ensure adequate protection for them.

Some delegations may express their disappointment that greater progress has not been made in the legal sub-committee on an agreement regarding assistance to and return of astronauts in distress. We, of course, would also have liked to have seen more substantial agreement in this area, but we do not feel that we should yield to pessimism. If the spirit of co-operation, so evident thus far, continues to prevail we hope that our continued efforts will lead to the solutions we all seek. We realize that the issues are complex and we should not be discouraged by the slow pace of our work. This should not be taken to mean, however, that we are complacent about our accomplishments in this area or satisfied at our rate of progress. Indeed the