

Statement No. 115

Statement made in the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, on the Draft Agreement on the Rescue of Astronauts, the Return of Astronauts, and the Return of Objects Launched into Outer Space, by the Canadian Representative, Mr. D.M. Miller, on December 16, 1967.

Mr. Chairman, we have before us the report of Legal Sub-Committee on its work during its very recent special session. In the meetings of that sub-committee, the Canadian delegation had an opportunity to express its views on the draft agreement on the rescue of astronauts, the return of astronauts and the return of objects launched into outer space. It is not my intention, therefore, to repeat these detailed observations here, but rather to limit my remarks to those of a more general character.

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 came into force earlier this year and to which Canada is proud to have become a party, solemnly affirmed important principles relating to international co-operation in outer space. Principles which had been engaging the attention of the United Nations for nearly five years. It also gave renewed impetus to the continuing effort to develop practical legal arrangements in respect to such questions as a assistance to and return of astronauts and space vehicles and liability for damage caused by the launching of objects into outer space; in order that the principles embodied in the Treaty might be expanded into a more comprehensive set of rules and thereby achieve their full potential for the orderly and lawful exploration and use of outer space.

In these circumstances it was only natural that the humanitarian aspects of the Treaty should invite immediate attention. The hazardous nature of outer space flight, underlined by the tragic deaths of American and Russian astronauts, necessitated that there be no legal or political barriers to prevent the swiftest and most effective help possible being extended to any astronaut who suffers accident, is experiencing conditions of distress or has made an emergency or unintended landing.

Earlier this year, my delegation said that although disappointed that the sixth regular session of the Legal Sub-Committee last summer had not made greater progress in this area, we should not be discouraged for the issues were complex and hence the pace of their resolution was of necessity deliberate. But we also warned that as the speed of space exploration