

Peaceful Uses and Exploration of Outer Space

On December 13, the Assembly unanimously adopted a declaration of nine legal principles intended to govern the activities of states in the use and exploration of outer space. Sponsored in Committee by the 28 members of the Assembly's Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, the declaration states that outer space and celestial bodies are not subject to national appropriation and that their use, which is subject to international law, is for the benefit of all mankind. One of the most important decisions taken by the Assembly in recent sessions, the declaration brings to fruition four years of continuing efforts on the part of Canada and other members of the Outer Space Committee to widen the areas of agreement already existing between the U.S.S.R. and the United States on their approach to the problems created by the use and exploration of outer space.

A second resolution, devoted this time to international co-operation in outer space, was also adopted unanimously by the Assembly on December 13. Acting on the recommendation of the First Committee, the Assembly endorsed the establishment of a "World Weather Watch" under the auspices of the World Meteorological Organization. The resolution further recognizes the potential contribution of space satellites in expanding global telecommunication facilities and the consequent effect which this development may have for increasing the flow of information. Dealing finally with space law, the resolution calls for the prompt preparation of international agreements on liability for damage caused by objects launched into outer space and on assistance to and return of astronauts and space vehicles.

Speaking on the item in Committee on December 5, the Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations, Mr. Paul Tremblay, greeted the declaration of principles as one of the most auspicious developments — perhaps the most auspicious development — in the process of bringing international order to outer space. "These legal principles" he went on, "are not merely goals; they are not simply expressions of hope. In the opinion of the Canadian Delegation, they reflect international law as it is accepted by member states. We consider it most important and significant that the two major space powers, the Soviet Union and the United States of America, should both have declared their intent . . . to conduct their activities in outer space in conformity with these principles. For its own part, the Government of Canada also wishes to state its willingness . . . to conduct any activities in outer space in which it may be involved in conformity with these principles." Mr. Tremblay added:

If I do not mention other arrangements for achieving co-operation in outer space through the United Nations, it is because I believe that they have been adequately treated in statements already made in this Committee. I wish to mention in passing that the Canadian Government is satisfied with progress being made, particularly in the establishment of a world weather system and in the use of outer space for expanding telecommunications. The arrangements made at the Space Radio-communications Conference convened recently in Geneva by the International Telecommunication Union represent an important development. My Government is also most interested in and following closely the arrangements which are being worked out for the development of a single global telecommunications system.