

Summary of the International Conference on Space Resources

(Vienna, 15 April 2024)

Held during the 63rd session of the Legal Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, the International Conference on Space Resources was organized in line with the Working Group's five-year workplan and terms of reference. The Conference, open to governments and invited stakeholders, was shaped by input from States and focused on five key topics:

Legal implications of space resource activities;

Information-sharing to support such activities;

The scope of future space resource activities;

Environmental and socioeconomic aspects;

International cooperation in research and technology.

To support the Conference, an expert meeting was held during Space Resources Week 2024 in Luxembourg, co-hosted by Belgium and Luxembourg with UN cooperation. Presenters were nominated by national delegations, and the programmes for both events were developed through intersessional consultations.

The Luxembourg expert meeting gathered preliminary inputs on three topics:

Future scope of space resource activities;

Environmental and socioeconomic aspects;

International cooperation in research and technology.

The expert meeting featured six panels—two per topic—to facilitate in-depth discussion and inform the Vienna Conference.

The International Conference on Space Resources, held in Vienna on 15 April 2024, during the sixty-third session of the Legal Subcommittee, focused on two of the five topics agreed by the Working Group. It comprised two panel discussions, on the following topics:

(a) Panel 1: implications of the legal framework for space resource activities;

(b) Panel 2: the role of governance, including information-sharing, in supporting space resource activities.

Panel on Legal Framework Implications for Space Resource Activities

Moderated by Andrzej Misztal, Chair of the Working Group, the panel brought together experts from ten countries and institutions, including China, Italy (**Sergio Marchisio**), the U.S., Morocco, Mexico, Ecuador, Greece, Germany, and the Russian Federation.

The discussion focused on the potential and necessity of an internationally agreed legal framework for space resource activities. Key points included:

The importance of ensuring compliance with existing international space law, particularly the Outer Space Treaty (OST), and clarifying the scope of rights and obligations under it.

A shared view that a common legal framework could help prevent conflict and overlapping claims, enhancing transparency, confidence-building, and peaceful cooperation.

Emphasis on non-appropriation, equitable access, and the sharing of benefits derived from space resources, aligning with OST principles.

Recognition of the need for adaptive governance models that reflect technological progress and anticipate future developments.

Reference to existing governance mechanisms, such as the ITU framework for radio frequencies, as potential models for space resource regulation.

The importance of defining what constitutes “space resources” and ensuring that future principles are sustainable, predictable, and legally sound.

The panel underlined the role of COPUOS in facilitating these developments and fostering international cooperation for the equitable and responsible use of outer space.

Panel on Governance and Information-Sharing

Moderated by Steven Freeland, Vice-Chair of the Working Group, this panel emphasized:

The centrality of information-sharing and international cooperation for safety, security, and sustainability, particularly in activities on the Moon and other celestial bodies.

The relevance of Article IX and XI of the Outer Space Treaty on mutual regard and information exchange.

Reference to legal and governance concepts such as “safety zones”, the Hague Building Blocks, and the Artemis Accords, highlighting various collaborative mechanisms.

Parallels with the Law of the Sea, especially regarding transparency, environmental protection, and the “common heritage of humankind”, as well as benefit-sharing models.

Consideration of national legislation, regulatory oversight mechanisms, environmental impact assessments, and the balance between innovation and protection.

Key Takeaways

Both panels contributed significantly to the Working Group’s five-year workplan by underscoring:

The need for cooperation, coordination, and multilateral engagement.

The value of transparency, inclusiveness, and ethical benefit-sharing.

The importance of data governance, private-public interaction, and adherence to the existing international legal framework.

The growing necessity of addressing environmental and socioeconomic impacts as space resource activities expand.