



Press Releases

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Agreement for enhanced international coordination to deal with potential asteroid threats reached at United Nations

VIENNA, 25 February (UN Information Service) - The striking coincidences of the asteroid 2012 DA14 flying close to the Earth, and a large meteor crash in Russia's Chelyabinsk region on 15 February, showed again the need for coordinated international efforts to predict, and if necessary, mitigate such threats posed by near-Earth objects in the future. This was one of the key items on the agenda of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee which concluded its 50th session on 22 February in Vienna.

The Subcommittee endorsed the report of its Working Group on Near-Earth Objects (NEOs) that recommended the establishment of an international asteroid warning network (IAWN) by linking together the institutions that are already performing many of the functions, including discovering, monitoring and physically characterizing the potentially hazardous NEO population and maintaining an internationally recognized clearing house for the receipt, acknowledgment and processing of all NEO observations. IAWN would also recommend criteria and thresholds for notification of an emerging impact threat, as well as a strategy using well-defined communication plans and procedures to assist Governments in their response to predicted impact consequences. A space mission planning advisory group (SMPAG) should be established by those Member States of the United Nations that have space agencies. This group, of representatives of space-faring nations and other relevant entities, would set the framework, timeline and options for initiating and executing space mission response activities. These recommendations will be looked at by the whole Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, at its fifty-sixth session from 12 to 21 June this year.

"Already in 1995, the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) organized the United Nations International Conference on Near-Earth Objects in New York to sensitize Member States to the potential threat of near-Earth objects, given the global consequences of their impact," Mazlan Othman, Director of UNOOSA, said at a press conference that discussed recommendations for an international response to the problem, as proposed by the UN Action Team on NEOs. The Scientific and Technical Subcommittee expressed sympathy with the Government and the people of the Russian Federation for the damage caused by the meteorite strike on 15 February, which injured hundreds of people and caused widespread damage.

Other key items for discussion by the Subcommittee included sustainable future use of outer space, space debris mitigation, disaster management and space weather research. In the two week session, the Subcommittee also debated recent developments in global navigation satellite systems, safe use of nuclear power sources in outer space, the use of the geostationary orbit, and matters related to remote sensing of the Earth by satellites, including applications for developing countries.

During the session, UNOOSA signed a cooperation agreement with Indonesia to establish a Regional Support Office that will serve as the centre of excellence that will complement the UNOOSA programme on disaster management - the United Nations Platform for Space-based Information for Disaster Management and Emergency Response, UN-SPIDER. "This 15th regional support office of UN-SPIDER will be located at the National Institute of Aeronautics and Space of the Republic of Indonesia, an impressive institution dealing with space technologies, remote sensing and imagery analysis, and has been a close partner of ours for many years, " said Mazlan Othman, UNOOSA Director at the signing ceremony on 12 February.

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