

General Assembly Fourth Committee Topic Summaries

Topic A: International Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space

In 1959, the United Nations General Assembly created the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS), which reports to the General Assembly Fourth Committee (GA4) and oversees the exploration and use of outer space for the benefit of humanity.¹ GA4 and COPUOS have both aimed to promote the peaceful uses of outer space through international legal instruments, research and development, and capacity building.² Five international treaties and five sets of international principles on space-related activities have been developed, including the *Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space and Other Celestial Bodies*, also known as the *Outer Space Treaty*.³ The *Outer Space Treaty* recognized outer space as the “common heritage of mankind,” meaning that it should be held in trust for future generations and protected from exploitation by individual Member States. As commercial space activities, including mining, tourism, and even habitation of outer space or celestial bodies is becoming increasingly possible, the international community has also increasingly discussed how to address outer space issues, including ownership, space junk, telecommunications, and related topics. The General Assembly First Committee continues to work to prevent a possible arms race in outer space and GA4 continues to promote and strengthen international cooperation in its peaceful uses.⁴ In its most recent resolution, *A/RES/72/77*, the General Assembly highlighted the importance of the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs and the need for more cooperation and information sharing to address emerging issues and challenges.

Topic B: Assistance in Mine Action

Each year, landmines and other explosive hazards injure or kill thousands globally.⁵ These explosive remnants of war can hinder the delivery of humanitarian assistance, prevent children from going to school, stop farmers working the land, and rob people of their livelihoods. The international community has attempted to combat the use of landmines and other indiscriminate weapons via several instruments, including the *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction* and the *Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons*, specifically its second protocol that covers mines, booby traps, and other devices. In order to assist Member States, the United Nations established its Mine Action Service (UNMAS) to lead, coordinate, and implement all aspects linked to the mitigation of threats from mines and explosive remnants of war.⁶ UNMAS coordinates all UN Mine Action and works with 11 other United Nations bodies to ensure an effective, proactive, and coordinating response to mines and explosive remnants of war. To this end, UNMAS has identified five pillars of mine action: clearance, education, victim assistance, advocacy, and stockpile destruction, which form the core of the international community’s response to the issue of mines.⁷ The General Assembly regularly adopts resolutions on mine action, most recently *A/RES/72/75*, and to examine how to best improve the situation worldwide.

¹ <http://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/ourwork/copuos/index.html>

² <http://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/ourwork/topics/capacity-building.html>

³ <http://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/ourwork/spacelaw/treaties.html>

⁴ <http://undocs.org/en/A/C.4/72/L.2>

⁵ <http://www.mineaction.org/unmas/about>

⁶ <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/un-mine-action-service-unmas>

⁷ <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/poverty-reduction/mine-action-for-sustainable-development.html>