

Key Themes from the 68th Session of COPUOS held June 25th - July 2nd 2025

Summary

This white paper summarizes key themes that emerged from the 2025 session of the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS). It highlights five major areas of consensus and five points of significant contention among Member States and Observers. The 2025 session reflected ongoing shifts in the geopolitical and commercial landscape of outer space, including the growing role of private actors, the development of lunar and cislunar operations, and intensifying concerns about long-term sustainability and security.

The Committee is composed of **104 Member States**, representing every region of the world. At the 68th session, **81 States Members** participated, reflecting a broad geographic and political spectrum. In addition to States, the session included participation from the **European Union** as a permanent observer and welcomed new observer delegations, including **Cambodia, Côte d'Ivoire, Honduras, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Maldives, Malta, the Republic of Moldova, Serbia, Uganda, the Holy See, and the League of Arab States**.

Institutional observers also played a prominent role. These included United Nations entities such as the **Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)**, the **Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)**, the **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)**, the **International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)**, and the **International Telecommunication Union (ITU)**. Intergovernmental organizations in attendance included the **Asia-Pacific Space Cooperation Organization (APSCO)**, the **Committee on Earth Observation Satellites (CEOS)**, the **European Organization for Astronomical Research in the Southern Hemisphere (ESO)**, the **European Space Agency (ESA)**, the **European Telecommunications Satellite Organization (EUTELSAT)**, the **Inter-Islamic Network on Space Sciences and Technology (ISNET)**, the **International Organization of Space Communications (Intersputnik)**, the **Regional Centre for Remote Sensing of the North African States (CRTEAN)**, the **Square Kilometre Array Observatory (SKAO)**, and the newly admitted **African Space Agency (AfSA)**.

A wide range of non-governmental organizations, professional societies, and industry groups also participated. These included the **Committee on Space Research (COSPAR)**, the **European Astronomical Society (EAS)**, the **European Space Policy Institute (ESPI)**, **For All Moonkind**, the **Global Satellite Operators Association (GSOA)**, the **International Academy of Astronautics (IAA)**, the **International Astronautical Federation (IAF)**, the **International Astronomical Union (IAU)**, the **International Institute of Space Law (IISL)**, the **International Peace Alliance (Space)**, the **Moon Village Association (MVA)**, the **National Space Society**

(NSS), the **Open Lunar Foundation**, the **Outer Space Institute (OSI)**, the **Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz International Prize for Water**, the **Secure World Foundation (SWF)**, the **Space Data Association (SDA)**, the **Space Generation Advisory Council (SGAC)**, **Space Renaissance International (SRI)**, **Three Country – Trusted Broker**, the **University Space Engineering Consortium-Global (UNISEC-Global)**, and the **World Space Week Association (WSWA)**. New non-governmental observers admitted during the session included the **Alliance for Collaboration in the Exploration of Space (ACES Worldwide)**, the **Lunar Policy Platform Foundation**, and **Women in Aerospace Europe (WIA-Europe)**.

This broad membership and diverse attendance underscore the role of COPUOS as the **primary multilateral forum for space governance**, where States, intergovernmental organizations, and non-governmental observers converge to deliberate on the peaceful uses of outer space.

Areas of Broad Agreement

1. Commitment to the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space

There was widespread reaffirmation of the foundational principle that outer space must be used exclusively for peaceful purposes. Numerous delegations condemned the weaponization of space and called for restraint in the development and testing of technologies with military applications.

2. Recognition of the Role of COPUOS and UNOOSA

COPUOS remains widely recognized as the central multilateral forum for space governance. Member States expressed strong support for the Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA), particularly in its efforts to advance capacity building, provide technical assistance, and promote equitable access to space data and infrastructure. At the same time, delegations took note of the public announcement by the Director of UNOOSA regarding a budget shortfall. In response, UNOOSA is developing a new funding mechanism to ensure the continuity of its programs and activities.

3. Emphasis on International Cooperation

Delegations emphasized the importance of cooperative approaches to space exploration and development. This included calls for increased collaboration in scientific research, disaster management, planetary defense, and data sharing across borders.

4. Support for the Long-Term Sustainability (LTS) Guidelines

There was near-universal endorsement of the LTS Guidelines and ongoing work of the LTS Working Group. Many delegations called for broader adoption, national implementation, and further technical deliberation on emerging sustainability risks.

5. Advancing Space for Sustainable Development

Many Member States highlighted the value of space technologies in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with particular support for UNOOSA-led initiatives such as Space4SDGs and UN-SPIDER. Applications in climate monitoring, agriculture, and disaster response were particularly emphasized.

Areas of Contention

1. Commercialization and the Role of Emerging Space Actors

While many countries welcomed increased private sector participation, others raised concerns about the dominance of well-resourced commercial actors and their potential to exacerbate inequalities in access to space resources and infrastructure.

2. Interpretation of the Outer Space Treaty

Differing legal interpretations were presented regarding how existing space law applies to new activities like satellite servicing, lunar resource extraction, and megaconstellations. Some delegations advocated for the development of new legally binding instruments, while others argued that the Outer Space Treaty provides a sufficient framework.

3. Space Resource Utilization (SRU)

The legality of national legislation allowing commercial space resource extraction remains contested. Some Member States argued such laws are incompatible with Article II of the Outer Space Treaty, while others defended them as consistent with non-appropriation principles and as necessary for enabling innovation.

4. Space Security and the Risk of Weaponization

Several delegations expressed alarm over recent anti-satellite (ASAT) tests and the perceived threat of militarization. Others maintained that their national activities were purely defensive and within the bounds of international law. This tension remains unresolved and continues to polarize Member States.

5. Jurisdictional Disputes Between COPUOS and the Conference on Disarmament

There was disagreement over whether COPUOS should engage in space security issues. Some delegations emphasized a strict division, relegating security to the Conference on Disarmament (CD). Others asserted that peaceful use cannot be meaningfully discussed without addressing threats to the space environment.