SPECPOL

Topic 2:Question of peaceful, sustainable, and equitable access to outer space.

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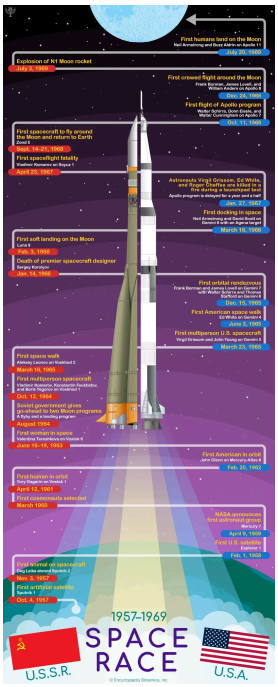
I. A Committee Overview

SPECPOL is the UN General Assembly's Fourth Committee. It handles political topics like decolonization, peacekeeping, and the peaceful use of outer space. This committee matters for global governance because it helps create agreement on sharing space benefits fairly, especially as more countries and companies enter space.

II. Background on the Topic

Peaceful, sustainable, and equitable access to outer space means every country can explore, use, and benefit from space without conflict, overcrowding, or leaving out poorer nations. This includes banning space wars, clearing orbital trash, sharing technology, and making sure profits from satellites or Moon rocks help everyone.

History kicked off on October 4, 1957, with Sputnik 1—the Soviet Union's first satellite, proving space travel was real and sparking a race between the US and the USSR. Fears grew that space could become a battlefield, so the UN stepped in. In 1961, Yuri Gagarin became the first human in space, followed by US efforts like Alan Shepard's flight. The 1963 UN Declaration of Legal Principles set basic rules: space for peace, no claims on the Moon.



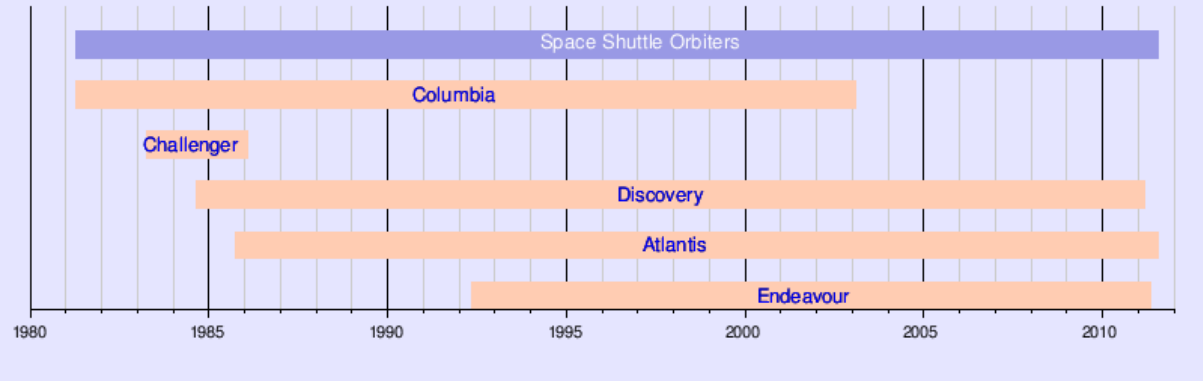
The big turning point was the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, signed by 110+ countries including the US, USSR, and UK. It declared space the "province of all mankind," banned nuclear weapons in orbit, and said no one owns celestial bodies.

Apollo 11's 1969 Moon landing showed space's promise, but Cold War tensions lingered. The 1972 Liability Convention made launch countries pay for damages. Cooperation shone in 1975's Apollo-Soyuz linkup. The 1980s-90s saw shuttle missions and Mir station, but accidents like Challenger (1986) highlighted risks.

The 2000s brought private players and new threats. China's 2007 ASAT test destroyed a satellite, creating 3,000+ debris pieces. The

2009 Iridium-Cosmos crash made 2,000 fragments. India's 2019 ASAT test aimed to be "debris-free," but still added junk. Russia's 2021 missile test forced ISS astronauts to shelter, producing 1,500 trackable pieces.

Current Situation: As of 2026, space is busier than ever. Over 12,900 active satellites orbit Earth, with plans for 100,000 by 2030 from mega-constellations like Starlink (6,000+ satellites). Debris totals 1.1 million pieces larger than 1cm, traveling at 18,000 mph; enough to destroy satellites or stations. ESA's 2025 report shows debris density matches active satellites in key low-Earth orbits.



Global stance calls for action: UNGA resolutions urge "responsible behaviors," debris limits, and tech transfer to developing countries. Why important? Space underpins daily life—GPS guides 7 billion devices, satellites track climate change, enable $1 trillion telecom market. Kessler Syndrome could wipe out orbits, costing trillions and widening rich-poor gaps.

Case studies: Starlink aids Ukraine but pollutes astronomy views and adds collision risks. UK's Astroscale grabbed junk in 2025 demos. China's Tiangong station and lunar lab show rising powers challenge US leads. Artemis missions plan Moon bases, but debates rage over mining rights under non-appropriation rules. Developing nations push for equity, as Africa has few satellites despite needing disaster alerts.

Without urgent pacts, 2026 conferences like Saudi's Space Debris event warn of "point of no return." SPECPOL must bridge divides for sustainable access.

III. Key terms and Definitions

Outer Space Treaty: 1967 UN pact banning nukes/weapons in orbit, territory claims; mandates peaceful use, cooperation.

Province of All Mankind: Article I principle, space exploration freely accessible, benefits all countries irrespective of development.

Space Debris: Man-made junk (satellites, stages, paint flecks) endangering missions; 36,500+ tracked, 900,000 >1cm.

Liability Convention: Absolute liability for ground damage, fault-based in space; e.g., Canada sued USSR post-1978 crash.

Registration Convention: States log objects with UNOOSA for ID/tracking; 80% compliance.

ASAT Weapons: Kinetic missiles, lasers destroying satellites; 10+ tests since 2005 fragmented 10,000+ pieces.

Mega-Constellations: 100s-1000s low-cost satellites (Starlink, OneWeb) for broadband; 60% new launches.

In-Orbit Servicing: Sat-to-sat refueling, repairs, deorbit (e.g., DARPA's RSGS robot).

PAROS: Prevention of Arms Race in Outer Space,proposed treaty banning weapons deployment.

IV. Relevant UN Bodies and Resolutions

United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA): UN Secretariat's space arm, headquartered in Vienna. Implements UN space policy, supports COPUOS sessions, runs UN-SPIDER for disaster management via satellites, registers objects, and promotes education/access for developing states. Manages Space Generation Advisory Council for youth input. In 2025, launched an online debris tracking portal used by 50 countries.

Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS): UN's main policy forum since 1959, with 102 member states. Meets annually in Vienna; two subcommittees—Scientific and Technical (STSC) covers sustainability/tech like debris models, Legal (LSC) drafts treaties. Working Groups on LTS, long-term agenda, near-Earth objects. SPECPOL approves its reports for UNGA.

V. Major Actors and their Relevance

United States: Leads with the Artemis Accords, now signed by 53 nations including Japan, Canada, and UAE. These promote safe lunar operations, data sharing, and emergency aid among partners. NASA runs a $25 billion budget for Artemis missions aiming for Moon landing in 2026 and Mars later. The US Space Force handles defense but stresses peaceful intent. America backs private companies like SpaceX, which handles 80% of global launches and Starlink mega-constellation.

China: Operates Tiangong space station since 2021 with full crew capacity. Launched Chang'e-6 Moon sample return in 2024 and plans lunar base by 2030. Developed robotic debris removal tools tested in 2025, grabbing defunct satellites with nets and magnets. Leads APSCO for Asia-Pacific space safety cooperation. Rejects Artemis as US-led bloc, prefers multilateral UN rules. Past 2007 ASAT test created long-lasting debris, fueling arms race worries.

Russia: Key ISS partner until 2028, providing Soyuz flights and modules. Conducted 2021 ASAT test creating 1,500 trackable fragments, drawing global anger and ISS sheltering. Opposes making LTS Guidelines mandatory, blocks binding debris rules in COPUOS. Demands no Western monopoly on lunar resources or orbits. Roscosmos tests nuclear-powered tugs for deep space and eyes Venus missions. Supports PAROS treaty to ban space weapons but distrusts US intentions.

India: ISRO landed Chandrayaan-3 on Moon south pole in 2023, first ever. Launched 2023 Gaganyaan human mission prep and NavIC GPS rival. Indian Space Policy 2023 opens sector to private firms like Skyroot and Agnikul for cheap launches. Performed 2019 ASAT test claiming minimal debris. Represents Global South, pushing orbital slot equity and tech transfers at low cost. Chairs Group of 77 on space issues.

France/EU (via ESA): Pushes Zero Debris Charter signed by 50+ agencies by 2025. Funds €1 billion cleanup tech like robotic arms. Ariane 6 rocket ensures independent access. Advocates binding UN measures on sustainability.

Non-state Actors

NGOs: Outer Space Institute researches equitable governance, lobbies for LTS enforcement. Secure World Foundation tracks satellites, pushes PAROS no-arms treaty. Union of Concerned Scientists runs a database of 5,000+ objects for transparency.

Private Sector / Corporations: SpaceX dominates with reusable Falcon/Starship, 7,000 Starlink birds providing internet to 3 million users across 100 countries; plans 34,000 more but adds collision alerts daily. Blue Origin's New Glenn enters market for heavy lift, eyes Moon lander. Amazon's Kuiper deploys 3,000 satellites. Astroscale Japan demos junk grappling 2025, contracts with 10 agencies. ClearSpace Europe preps mission to deorbit Vespa rocket stage.

Regional Organisations: European Space Agency coordinates 22 nations, issues annual debris reports, leads Zero Debris by 2030 goal with active removal tests. Asia-Pacific Space Cooperation Organization (APSCO, China-led) trains engineers from 11 members on safety. Asia-Pacific Regional Space Agency Forum shares data. African Space Agency (new 2023) seeks satellites for drought monitoring despite few launches.

VI. Guiding Questions

- How can delegates enforce a strict 25-year satellite deorbit rule for all launches without hurting new economies?
- What funding models like global taxes on orbital slots could pay for debris cleanup operations?
- Should SPECPOL draft a binding PAROS treaty banning all space weapons deployment amid US-China tensions?
- How to create mandatory tech transfer programs so Africa and Latin America build their own satellites?
- What penalties including sanctions for ASAT tests that create hazardous debris clouds?
- Can Artemis Accords principles be universalized into UN rules acceptable to Russia and China?
- How to regulate mega-constellations to cut light pollution harming astronomy worldwide?
- Should Moon and asteroid mining profits go to a UN fund for equitable space access?
- What insurance or global fund prepares nations for Kessler Syndrome economic fallout?
- How to cap private company liability while holding states fully responsible for damages?

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