

UN and UK sign agreement to promote space sustainability

The agreement will help nations ensure that outer space remains safe and sustainable for future generations.

The increasing complexity of space missions, the emergence of large constellations of satellites and the increased risks of collision all affect the long-term sustainability of space activities. And there are currently approximately 170 million objects in orbit – mainly debris – which could collide with satellites vital to services we use every day.

In 2019, the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS), of which the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) is Secretariat, adopted the Guidelines for the Long-Term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities (LTS guidelines), which provide a framework to ensure the safe and sustainable use of space. The Guidelines were subsequently welcomed by the United Nations General Assembly.

Following today's announcement, UK funding of £85,000 will support international efforts to promote space sustainability by identifying examples of the sustainable use of outer space through a series of events and outreach efforts. This project will also inform future UNOOSA capacity-building efforts to promote the future sustainability of outer space, and it will encourage all actors to implement the LTS guidelines to the fullest extent possible.

Science Minister Amanda Solloway said:

As the Earth's orbit becomes congested with potentially hazardous debris, it's critical that we work with our international partners to secure the continued safety and sustainability of space.

I am therefore delighted the UK is partnering with the UN to implement and promote these vital standards to all emerging and established space-faring nations, helping to ensure that outer space remains open for our next generation of astronauts.

This partnership with the UK Space Agency is the first time the UK has funded a project with UNOOSA. It will enable the UN to raise global awareness on this important issue and foster the global governance of outer space based on international law.

It is also the first project to be funded from the international element of the UK Space Agency's National Space Innovation Programme, launched in October 2020 to support collaborative projects between UK organisations and international partners.

UNOOSA Director Simonetta Di Pippo said:

Global investment, and dependency, on space activities are increasing rapidly. It is essential the international community comes together to make the long-term sustainability of space activities a reality. The LTS Guidelines are a landmark expression of global consensus and effective multilateralism on this crucial subject.

UNOOSA is working to put sustainability at the heart of global space operations. This project, generously funded by our UK partners, will help us 'connect the dots'; converting the successes of multilateral policy-making into practice, and help deliver the predictability the global space economy needs to ensure its sustained growth in the years to come.