COPUOS

United Nations Committee on the
Peaceful Uses of Outer Space

"Space colonization and the
exploitation of resources
beyond Earth"

BACKGROUND GUIDE

Dear delegates,

It is a great honor for me, along with my chair, to warmly welcome you to this committee at LASALLECUNMUN2026. My name is Christian Sánchez Álvarez, and this year I am proud to serve as Chair of the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS). This will be my first time as chair, and I am confident that together we will have an enriching experience. I hope that, like me, you will become passionate about this committee and discover its enormous potential to open our minds and prepare us as future leaders.

Since I learned about the concept of Model United Nations, I have been deeply drawn to everything it represents: research, debate, diplomacy, and constant learning. In my first participation, I had the opportunity to represent Russia, and I fully immersed myself in my role, researching not only that country but also each of the nations with which I would debate. For me, the MUN has never been a simple academic activity, but rather an invaluable opportunity for growth that no one should miss. I am currently 16 years old, and in my fourth semester at A.D.N. Since I was little, I have had a keen interest in different areas of knowledge, especially programming, law, outer space, and administration. These passions have accompanied me since I was six and have motivated me to set clear goals for my future. One of them is to study at Harvard University, whose academic excellence and international prestige deeply inspire me. I am a person who loves programming and leaves nothing to chance when something truly interests me, I dedicate myself with discipline and passion until I achieve results that even others would consider unattainable. I consider this ability one of my greatest strengths. Thanks to it, today I also teach classes to young people in Africa, which has been a transformative experience and has taught me the value of sharing knowledge with those who need it most.

Among my greatest dreams is to become one of the most successful young people in the world and use those resources to support others who, like me, pursue great goals. I firmly believe that success depends not only on ideas but also on perseverance and action. That's why I like to remind you that "ideas are only 1%, while applying them is 99%." That's the message I want to convey to you today: don't be afraid to think big, aim higher, and strive for what you're truly passionate about.

Christian Sánchez Álvarez

COMMITTEE ON THE PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE (COPUOS)

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COMMITTEE DESCRIPTION

The Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) was set up by the General Assembly in 1959 to govern the exploration and use of space for the benefit of all humanity: for peace, security, and development, while also addressing the increasing complexities and challenges posed by advancements in space technology and the growing interest of both developed and developing nations in utilizing outer space for various purposes. The Committee was tasked with reviewing international cooperation in peaceful uses of outer space, studying space-related activities that could be undertaken by the United Nations, encouraging space research programs, and studying legal problems arising from the exploration of outer space.

Topic: "Space colonization and the exploitation of resources beyond Earth. "

INTRODUCTION

Space colonization and the exploitation of extraterrestrial resources are no longer just the stuff of science fiction; they represent one of the most strategic and controversial frontiers of international relations in the 21st century. Current projects, such as NASA's Artemis Program, China's lunar missions, and private initiatives led by companies like SpaceX and Blue Origin, are accelerating humanity's progress toward establishing a permanent presence on the Moon and, eventually, on Mars. These initiatives include not only the construction of bases and habitats, but also the extraction of resources such as lunar ice for water and fuel, rare minerals for advanced technology, and the harvesting of solar energy in orbit.

However, the pursuit of these opportunities poses complex challenges. The enormous economic and technological costs, the environmental risks of altering celestial bodies, and the ethical dilemmas surrounding the preservation of outer space limit the viability of large-scale exploitation. Furthermore, geopolitical competition could transform space into a new arena of inequality and conflict if not properly regulated. The 1967 Outer Space Treaty prohibits national appropriation of space or its resources, but does not establish a clear mechanism for commercial exploitation or benefit-sharing. Therefore, within the framework of COPUOS, the debate has become urgent: should outer space be used primarily for the benefit of all humanity, or will resource exploitation lead to a new "space race" that benefits only a few powerful actors?

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The idea of space colonization emerged during the Cold War, when the Space Race served as a platform for demonstrating technological superiority. Milestones such as Sputnik (1957), Yuri Gagarin's first manned flight (1961), and the Apollo 11 moon landing (1969) demonstrated that humans could reach and survive in space, inspiring the first proposals for permanent settlements beyond Earth. At the end of the 20th century, scientists and policymakers began to discuss not only colonization but also the possibility of exploiting asteroids and the Moon to address future resource scarcity on Earth.

To regulate these developments, the United Nations created COPUOS in 1959. Since then, several landmark agreements have shaped space governance. The 1967 Outer Space Treaty remains the cornerstone, ensuring that space is used for peaceful purposes and belongs to all humanity. The Rescue Agreement (1968), the Liability Convention (1972), and the Registration Convention (1976) further defined the responsibilities of states in space activities. The 1979 Moon Agreement introduced the principle that lunar resources are the common heritage of humanity, but its limited ratification weakened its global application.

In the 21st century, new actors have transformed the debate. The rise of private companies proposing asteroid mining and lunar exploitation has created legal loopholes, as existing treaties do not clearly regulate commercial activities. Countries such as the United States (Commercial Space Launch Competitiveness Act of 2015) and Luxembourg (Space Resources Act of 2017) have passed national laws granting companies the right to possess extracted space resources, raising concerns about compliance with international standards. Within the framework of COPUOS, debates have intensified over whether unilateral national laws undermine the principle of space as a shared domain.

The UN has also participated in more recent debates through initiatives such as the 2019 Guidelines for the Long-Term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities, which emphasize cooperation, transparency, and environmental protection in outer space. However, there is currently no binding international framework regulating space mining or colonization, making this issue an urgent matter for the international community.

CURRENT SITUATION

In recent years, space colonization and the exploitation of extraterrestrial resources have moved from theoretical debates to concrete actions, driven primarily by technological progress and the growing interest of both states and private companies. NASA's Artemis Program aims to return humans to the Moon by 2026 and establish a sustainable lunar base, while China's Chang'e missions and plans for a lunar research station with Russia mark a new era of competition and cooperation in space. At the same time, private companies such as SpaceX, Blue Origin, and Asteroid Mining Corporation are investing in resource extraction technologies, from lunar ice harvesting to asteroid mining. These advances have intensified debates in the international community about ownership, sustainability, and equitable access to benefits.

The United Nations and COPUOS have emphasized that outer space must remain a domain for peaceful purposes and for the benefit of all humanity. In 2019, COPUOS adopted the Guidelines for the Long-Term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities, urging states and private actors to act responsibly, cooperate, and share information. However, these guidelines are non-binding, and no updated treaty specifically regulates space mining or colonization. This has created legal uncertainty, as some countries have already made progress in drafting national laws. The United States passed the Commercial Space Launch Competitiveness Act (2015), Luxembourg introduced its Space Resources Act (2017), and the United Arab Emirates has begun drafting regulations to allow companies to claim extracted resources. These unilateral measures, while promoting innovation, raise concerns about whether they undermine the principle that space is a global common.

The current situation reveals a marked divide among member states. Developed spacefaring countries argue that private investment is essential for progress, while developing countries fear that unequal access to space resources will reproduce or even exacerbate existing inequalities on Earth. Some states, particularly in the Global South, insist that any exploitation of extraterrestrial resources must include benefit-sharing mechanisms, similar to those regulating the deep seabed under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Others worry that an unregulated "space rush" could lead to environmental damage to celestial bodies, the militarization of resource areas, and geopolitical disputes between major powers.

The consequences of inaction could be dire. Without a comprehensive international framework, space colonization and resource exploitation could become a competitive race dominated by a handful of powerful nations and corporations, leaving less developed states behind. This could lead to disputes over lunar territories, asteroid mining rights, and even the militarized protection of operations. On the other hand, a well-regulated system under the guidance of COPUOS and the UN could transform outer space into a cooperative arena, where scientific advancement, sustainable resource use, and benefit-sharing mechanisms ensure that humanity as a whole, and not just a select few, benefits from the coming era of exploration.

BUSINESS BOX

Astrobotic Technology
Astroscale
Blue Canyon Technologies
Blue Origin
Capella Space
CSA – Canadian Space Agency
ESA – European Space Agency
Intuitive Machines
ISRO – Indian Space Research Organisation
JAXA – Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency
Kepler Communications
Made in Space
Momentus
NASA – National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Nanoracks
Planet Labs
Redwire
Relativity Space
SES
SpaceX
Varda Space Industries

GUIDE QUESTIONS

I. What is your country/company's position regarding the exploitation of resources beyond Earth and space colonization?
II. What actions do you consider necessary to regulate the exploitation of space resources and prevent international conflicts?
III. What consequences could arise if mining and colonization on other celestial bodies are permitted or prohibited?
IV. What international agreements or collaborations should be implemented to ensure the sustainable and ethical use of space?
V. How can your country/company contribute to the development of space technology without jeopardizing the space environment or the interests of other countries?

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