



General Assembly

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95th plenary meeting
3 December 1986

41/65. Principles relating to remote sensing of the Earth from space

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolution 3234 (XXIX) of 12 November 1974, in which it recommended that the Legal Sub-Committee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space should consider the question of the legal implications of remote sensing of the Earth from space, as well as its resolutions 3388 (XXX) of 18 November 1975, 31/8 of 8 November 1976, 32/196 A of 20 December 1977, 33/16 of 10 November 1978, 34/66 of 5 December 1979, 35/14 of 3 November 1980, 36/35 of 18 November 1981, 37/89 of 10 December 1982, 38/80 of 15 December 1983, 39/96 of 14 December 1984 and 40/162 of 16 December 1985, in which it called for a detailed consideration of the legal implications of remote sensing of the Earth from space, with the aim of formulating draft principles relating to remote sensing,

Having considered the report of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space on the work of its twenty-ninth session and the text of the draft Principles Relating to Remote Sensing of the Earth from Space, annexed thereto,

Noting with satisfaction that the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, on the basis of the deliberations of its Legal Sub-Committee, has endorsed the text of the draft Principles Relating to Remote Sensing of the Earth from Space,

Believing that the adoption of the Principles Relating to Remote Sensing of the Earth from Space will contribute to the strengthening of international co-operation in this field,

Adopts the Principles Relating to Remote Sensing of the Earth from Space set forth in the annex to the present resolution.

ANNEX

Principles Relating to Remote Sensing of the Earth from Space

Principle I

For the purposes of these principles with respect to remote sensing activities:

(a) The term "remote sensing" means the sensing of the Earth's surface from space by making use of the properties of electromagnetic waves emitted, reflected or diffracted by the sensed objects, for the purpose of improving natural resources management, land use and the protection of the environment;

(b) The term "primary data" means the raw data that are acquired by remote sensors borne by a space object and that are transmitted or delivered to the ground from space by telemetry in the form of electromagnetic signals, by photographic film, magnetic tape or any other means;

(c) The term "processed data" means the products resulting from the processing of the primary data, needed to make such data usable;

(d) The term "analysed information" means the information resulting from the interpretation of processed data, inputs of data and knowledge from other sources;

(e) The term "remote sensing activities" means the operation of remote sensing space systems, primary data collection and storage stations, and activities in processing, interpreting and disseminating the processed data.

Principle II

Remote sensing activities shall be carried out for the benefit and in the interests of all countries, irrespective of their degree of economic, social or scientific and technological development, and taking into particular consideration the needs of the developing countries.

Principle III

Remote sensing activities shall be conducted in accordance with international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, and the relevant instruments of the International Telecommunication Union.

Principle IV

Remote sensing activities shall be conducted in accordance with the principles contained in article I of the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, which, in particular provides that the exploration and use of outer space shall be carried out for the benefit and in the interests of all countries, irrespective of their degree of economic or scientific development, and stipulates the principle of freedom of exploration and use of outer space on the basis of equality. These activities shall be conducted on the basis of respect for the principle of full and permanent sovereignty of all States and peoples over their own wealth and natural resources, with due regard to the rights and interests, in accordance with international law, of other States and entities under their jurisdiction. Such activities shall not be conducted in a manner detrimental to the legitimate rights and interests of the sensed State.

Principle V

States carrying out remote sensing activities shall promote international co-operation in these activities. To this end, they shall make available to other States opportunities for participation therein. Such participation shall be based in each case on equitable and mutually acceptable terms.

Principle VI

In order to maximize the availability of benefits from remote sensing activities, States are encouraged, through agreements or other arrangements, to provide for the establishment and operation of data collecting and storage stations and processing and interpretation facilities, in particular within the framework of regional agreements or arrangements wherever feasible.

Principle VII

States participating in remote sensing activities shall make available technical assistance to other interested States on mutually agreed terms.

Principle VIII

The United Nations and the relevant agencies within the United Nations system shall promote international co-operation, including technical assistance and co-ordination in the area of remote sensing.

Principle IX

In accordance with article IV of the Convention on Registration of Objects Launched into Outer Space and article XI of the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, a State carrying out a programme of remote sensing shall inform the Secretary-General of the United Nations. It shall, moreover, make available any other relevant information to the greatest extent feasible and practicable to any other State, particularly any developing country that is affected by the programme, at its request.

Principle X

Remote sensing shall promote the protection of the Earth's natural environment. To this end, States participating in remote sensing activities that have identified information in their possession that can be used to avert any phenomenon harmful to the Earth's natural environment shall disclose such information to States concerned.

Principle XI

Remote sensing shall promote the protection of mankind from natural disasters. To this end, States participating in remote sensing activities that have identified processed data and analysed information in their possession that may be useful to States affected by natural disasters, or likely to be affected by impending natural disasters, shall transmit such data and information to States concerned as promptly as possible.

Principle XII

As soon as the primary data and the processed data concerning the territory under its jurisdiction are produced, the sensed State shall have access to them on a non-discriminatory basis and on reasonable cost terms. The sensed State shall also have access to the available analysed information concerning the territory under its jurisdiction in the possession of any State participating in remote sensing activities on the same basis and terms, particular regard being given to the needs and interests of the developing countries.

Principle XIII

To promote and intensify international co-operation, especially with regard to the needs of developing countries, a State carrying out remote sensing of the Earth from space shall, upon request, enter into consultations with a State whose territory is sensed in order to make available opportunities for participation and enhance the mutual benefits to be derived therefrom.

Principle XIV

In compliance with article VI of the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, States operating remote sensing satellites shall bear international responsibility for their activities and assure that such activities are conducted in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty and the norms of international law, irrespective of whether such activities are carried out by governmental or non-governmental entities or through international organizations to which such States are parties. This principle is without prejudice to the applicability of the norms of international law on State responsibility for remote sensing activities.

Principle XV

Any dispute resulting from the application of these principles shall be resolved through the established procedures for the peaceful settlement of disputes.