

**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR XOLISA MABHONGO DURING THE
COMMEMORATIVE EVENT TO MARK THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FIRST
HUMAN SPACE FLIGHT AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS
COMMITTEE ON THE PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE, 1 JUNE 2011.**

Chairperson,

It is significant that we have gathered today to mark the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNCOPOUS). UNCOPOUS has had notable achievements and played a practical role in promoting the peaceful uses of outer space. The Committee has assisted with the development of international space law and the promotion of international cooperation on space matters.

Today we also celebrate 50 years since the Russian cosmonaut, Yuri Gagarin, made history when he became the first person to be lifted into space. His flight inspired many generations and laid the basis for much further development of space exploration.

We meet today as representatives of governments, international organisations and private sector to celebrate these tremendous developments in space use and exploration. Our meeting bears testimony to the benefits of enhanced international cooperation in space use and exploration.

Chairperson,

We take cognisance of the important role that space technology can play in socio-economic development. Space technology contributes to the upliftment of the human condition through its use in areas such as water management, environment conservation, land use and management, the development of new medicines as well as better and improved communications. South Africa therefore places great importance to the development of space technology.

We believe that international and regional cooperation will enable countries to benefit even more from the peaceful use of outer space. In this regard, South Africa is pleased to work together with Algeria, Nigeria and Kenya in the intra-African initiative called the African Resource Management Constellation. The ARMC aims to develop a network of satellites to make space technology more accessible to African end-users in areas such as environmental monitoring, land use, water management and public health and also contribute to food security.

South Africa wishes to emphasise the importance of the long-term sustainability of the human use of outer space. We are convinced that the current generation has a responsibility to ensure that future generations also reap benefits from the peaceful use of outer space. Furthermore the principle of equity in the exploitation of outer space should ensure that all countries, big and small, benefit.

Chairperson,

South Africa has been actively involved in space science and technology projects for many years. We have a rich heritage of involvement since 1685. In 1820 a permanent observatory was established outside Cape Town, practising astronomy and later culminating into the construction of the Southern African Large Telescope (SALT) in Sutherland.

South Africa has been an active participant in the exploration of space since the dawn of the Space Age - wherein from the 1950s to the 1970s satellites were tracked to determine the effects of upper atmosphere on their orbits. Lunar and interplanetary orbits were supported by the tracking station at Hartebeesthoek. The station received images of the planet Mars taken by the Mariner IV spacecraft, the first images of Mars and another planet to be received on Earth.

Amongst other achievements - in 1999 we launched our first satellite called SunSat as an experiment for remote sensing applications. South Africa's second satellite, Sumbandilsat, was launched in September 2009 in Kazakhstan, on a Soyuz II-1B rocket.

In conclusion,

It is also fitting that in the year of this 50th anniversary of human space flight and the establishment of COPUOS, South Africa will host the 62nd International Astronautical Congress (IAC) in Cape Town in October. This is the first time that the IAC will be held on African soil. We look forward to welcoming you to South Africa to participate in this historic event.

Thank you.