

## **8<sup>th</sup> IAA Planetary Defence Conference**

**Niklas Hedman**  
**UNOOSA Acting Director**

### **Keynote address**

Distinguished speakers, dear participants, ladies and gentlemen,

Let me also take this opportunity to welcome you all at the 8th IAA Planetary Defence Conference.

Allow me to thank, at the beginning, the International Academy of Astronautics, IAA - the holder of this conference as well as our partners, the European Space Agency and the Austrian Academy of Science, and its Geosciences Commission for their support. Let me also extend a warm thank you to our host country Austria, the Austrian Research Promotion Agency FFG, the Austrian Space Forum, the City of Vienna, and the Natural History Museum Vienna as well as to the organizers, PDC Chairs and the members of the Local Organizing Committee for their engagement.

Every two years this conference brings together world's experts to discuss what's known about potentially hazardous asteroids and comets and how we might mount a defensive action in case one is on a collision course with Earth. It is exciting to see the large audience that gathered here, both, in-person in Board Room D as well as virtually to take part in the 8<sup>th</sup> IAA hybrid Planetary Defense Conference. I am also pleased to note that the conference is webcast live on our Outer Space UN TV channel.

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished participants,

Forging global partnerships and building resilient societies through better coordination are among the key challenges of the twenty-first century. Given the global consequences of a near-Earth object (NEO) impact and the considerable resources required to prevent a collision, the

United Nations, through its Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA), has been involved in the international discourse and dialogue on the topic of NEOs, raising awareness and promoting global cooperation.

Addressing such a hazard, including the identification of objects that pose a threat of impact to Earth, and planning a corresponding mitigation campaign, require cooperative action in the interest of public safety on the part of the global community.

The Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) plays a leading role in this regard. Established in 1959, COPUOS serves as the primary UN body for coordinating and facilitating international cooperation in space activities and its global participation underlines the unique nature of the Committee.

Following UNISPACE III Conference of 1999, and its outcome document the Vienna Declaration on Space and Human Development, an even stronger collaboration was envisioned to deal with the potential threat posed by near-Earth objects, opening new chapters of cooperation under the United Nations.

The establishment of the Action Team on NEOs and the addition of NEOs as a new agenda item of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee of COPUOS are the legacy of this Vienna declaration.

This year we mark 10 years since the dedicated Working Group on NEOs under the agenda item of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee of COPUOS, completed its multi-year multilateral effort, and proposed to member States the establishment of the International Asteroid Warning Network (IAWN) and the Space Mission Planning Advisory Group (SMPAG). These two new entities, establishment of which was welcomed by the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 70/82, were formally created in 2014 and are now the leading bodies for a coordinated international response to the NEO impact threat.

As this area is crucial to ensuring human security, the United Nations continues to facilitate the processes for developing an international response to a NEO-impact threat.

Acting as a gateway to space in the United Nations system, UNOOSA is uniquely positioned in intergovernmental cooperation and coordination on outer space activities, and in the broader perspective of space security, including the area of planetary defence.

We attach great importance to the work done by the SMPAG and IAWN and are closely engaged with both entities. Besides its mandate as a secretariat to SMPAG, UNOOSA has an observer status to both entities. Additionally, through IAWN and SMPAG, UNOOSA facilitates the dissemination of information related to NEOs to UN Member States.

Both IAWN and SMPAG annually report to the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space under the dedicated agenda item on near-Earth objects and inform the member States on their progress of work.

I'm pleased to note that since the last reporting by the IAWN and SMPAG to the Subcommittee, the IAWN network now comprises more than 50 signatories to their Statement of Intent, bringing together world-wide observatories in a joint collaborative effort to observe, detect and track NEOs. I'm also pleased to note that the Space Mission Advisory Group, mandated to provide advice in case of an actual asteroid impact threat to member States of COPUOS, now comprised 18 space agencies to discuss and recommend such potential NEO-deflection mission options.

The goal is to ensure that all countries, in particular developing nations with limited capacity for predicting and mitigating a NEO impact, are aware of potential threats as well as to guarantee an effective emergency response and disaster management in the event of a NEO impact. As this area is crucial to ensuring human security, the United Nations continues to facilitate the processes for developing an international response to a NEO-impact threat, with the Office for Outer Space Affairs playing an active role.

Important linkages are also being made with civil protection communities, including through our UN-SPIDER programme and its global network of Regional Support Offices with the goal to sensitize States and their relevant national authorities to the existence of NEOs as potential natural disaster hazards and to address this as part of their national emergency response and preparedness strategies.

For more information about our collaborative efforts in this area, please refer also to the printed brochure available for this conference entitled “Near-Earth Objects and Planetary Defence”.

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished participants,

As we look through the programme, I am certain that we have plenty of interesting and engaging discussions ahead of us. Highly professionally tailored scientific sessions, presentations and panels will run daily. These include dedicated panels on technical, legal and policy aspects of planetary defence; disaster managers discussions that will also include a team from the UN-SPIDER programme; lessons that can be learned from the pandemic and other disasters, and so much more. We even have an initiative for an UN-designated International Year of Planetary Defence.

In a hypothetical asteroid impact scenario, we will delve into key questions on decision-making and communication with the public and disaster management community. It will also serve as a great opportunity to identify and suggest solutions for potential gaps and hopefully, come up with recommendations for the way forward at the policy level.

I wish you all an engaging and productive conference with lot of lessons learned in addressing, this time - a HYPOTHETICAL asteroid impact scenario.

Thank you.