

International Interdisciplinary Congress on Space Debris Remediation – 11-12 November 2011

Opening Remarks by Professor Ram Jakhu

Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Ram Jakhu and I am an Associate Professor at the McGill Faculty of Law. Along with our team, I will be your host for these two days. Welcome to our Faculty.

I know that you all are very busy people because you are the best in your fields of expertise. Therefore, I would like to express my deep appreciation and gratitude to each and every one of you, especially those who came from faraway places in Australia, China, India and Japan, for your time and effort in coming to Montreal.

As you know well, nowadays there is news almost every week, if not every day, of something falling from the sky. Things are expected to get worse, if nothing is done about the rapid increase in space debris. Consequently, the sustainability of space utilization, even in the medium term, could be in serious jeopardy.

The problems caused by space debris are international in scope and nature, thus they ought to be discussed through international fora, both governmental and academic like this one. At the same time, the problems are complicated as they involve scientific, technical, commercial, military, policy and legal factors. Therefore, the solutions should be sought following an interdisciplinary approach. In my view, interdisciplinary approach is not for integrated results but for solutions arrived at through coordination among important and relevant disciplines.

Following international and interdisciplinary approach, we at the Institute of Air and Space Law have in the past two years organised two space debris congresses. The two previous congresses were focused mainly on minimizing the creation of new space debris. This third congress is intended to address the question of removal of the existing space debris, including on-orbit servicing of satellites. The congress will explore the issues specifically described in the program, as well as other equally relevant matters, with the hope of garnering international attention and possibly seeking solution(s) to the problem of space debris.

The main points of our discussion are:

- To assess the current space debris situation and to determine what can be achieved by space debris remediation and on-orbit servicing of satellites;
- To examine various technical concepts and means, legal and economic aspects, operational and organizational requirements for space debris remediation and on-orbit servicing of satellites; and,
- To put forward specific and viable policy and regulatory steps (mechanisms) that may be considered by states and other stakeholders to facilitate the removal of pieces of space debris and the servicing of satellites on orbit.

Thus the sequence of discussion sessions is as follows:

- What is the nature and scope of the problem of space debris?
- What techniques are being proposed to resolve the identified problem?
- To what extent are the proposed techniques valid under the existing law?
- How should the best techniques be implemented through decision-making fora and new policies, laws and procedures?

We should keep in mind that the role of law, in space debris remediation, will essentially be to render legitimacy and authority (possibly binding) to the technical solutions adopted and practiced.

Following the Chatham House Rule, we will brainstorm over the next two days. On the basis of discussions and recommendations made here we will produce a report as well as the basic constitutive elements of an international environmental declaration on what should be done with respect to debris remediation and on-orbit servicing of satellites. The report of the congress will be published, widely distributed and presented at appropriate international fora, including the COPUOS of the United Nations.

This event is organised in collaboration with the Cologne Institute of Air and Space Law, and the International Association for the Advancement of Space Safety. It is cosponsored by the Canadian Space Agency and the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs. The congress is financially supported by the Erin J. C. Arsenault Trust Fund at McGill University. We are indebted to the Arsenault Foundation, without whose support this meeting would have not taken place.

We will make every effort to make your participation in the congress and stay in Montreal as smooth and enjoyable as possible. However, please keep in mind that there is an ongoing strike by administrative support staff at McGill University. Accordingly, we request for your understanding and cooperation. Please do not hesitate to contact any one of us, should you need any assistance in logistical matters.

Finally, as you know that today is Remembrance Day. Thus at 11.00 we should pause our activities and observe one minute of silence to remember the thousands of men and women who sacrificed their lives for Canada and other peace-loving countries.

Before we start our first session, I request our Director Prof. Paul Dempsey and our Dean Prof. Daniel Jutras to say a few words of welcome to you.

Ram Jakhu
Congress Chair