



## UN marks 50th anniversary of historic first human space flight



Photo exhibition celebrating "Yuri Gagarin: First Man in Space"

7 April 2011 – The United Nations today marked the 50th anniversary of the first manned flight in outer space by Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin with a special session of the General Assembly and the opening of an exhibit to commemorate one of the greatest triumphs in human history.

Mr. Gagarin became the first human being to travel into space on 12 April 1961 when he orbited the Earth on the Vostok-1 spacecraft in a flight lasting 108 minutes.

"Fifty years have passed since that amazing voyage, but the legend of Gagarin's courage and journey to the 'final frontier' continues to be a source of inspiration for space exploration for peoples and nations around the world," stated Kiyoko Akasaka, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information.

Addressing the opening of the photo exhibit at UN Headquarters in New York, Mr. Akasaka noted that when Mr. Gagarin – known as "the Columbus of the Cosmos" – travelled into outer space, the space race that raged in the 1950s and 1960s showed no signs of abating.

"It was the height of the Cold War, the Berlin Wall was built, and who at that time could have imagined that, one day, more than 15 nations would work together in humanity's permanent space outpost – the International Space Station," he said.

Yet, Mr. Akasaka added, even before Mr. Gagarin opened the cosmos to humankind, the UN had already included outer space on its agenda – in 1958. The following year, in 1959, the UN General Assembly set up the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space.

Over the past 50 years, the Vienna-based Committee has developed five treaties and five principles governing the use of outer space. It has also helped States to develop their capabilities to use space technology for sustainable development.

The 70-member body is supported by the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs, which is headed by Mazlan Othman. Among the Office's many responsibilities are assisting countries in using space technology for development, and maintaining the Register of Objects Launched into Outer Space.

"It is thanks to the pioneering work of cosmonauts, astronauts, and scientists, and to today's international cooperation that we can increasingly benefit from space science and space applications for the well-being of humanity and development," noted Mr. Akasaka.

During its special session, the Assembly adopted a resolution declaring 12 April as the International Day of Human Space Flight.

Assembly President Joseph Deiss said that the Day will not only pay tribute to the courage of Mr. Gagarin but also provide an opportunity to reflect on the contribution of his expedition, noting that space science has led to developments in areas such as meteorology, agriculture, satellite navigation and telecommunications, biology and physics.

The session also featured remarks from astronauts Dmitry Kondratiev of the Russian federal space agency, Catherine Coleman of NASA and Paolo Nespoli of the European space agency, all of whom were speaking from the International Space Station.

As part of the commemoration, the Post of Russia and the UN Postal Administration will issue souvenir stamps on 12 April, including one featuring an iconic image of Mr. Gagarin.

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