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First annual UN celebration marks 50 years since human space travel began



UN commemorates 50th anniversary of Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin's first flight in space at the Monument to the Explorers of Space

12 April 2011 – The United Nations today celebrated the first annual International Day of Human Space Flight, marking 50 years since Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin made history by becoming the first human to travel into outer space.

“Yuri Gagarin’s flight is an inspiration that engenders a quest for excellence; an inspiration that fans the flames of passion to pursue a dream, especially among the young. There is no higher value you can place on his achievement,” said Mazlan Othman, Director of the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA).

During a special session held last week, the General Assembly declared that 12 April, the date on which Mr. Gagarin orbited the Earth in a 108-minute flight, will be observed annually as the International Day and serve to reaffirm the important contribution of space science and technology, as well as to further the aspiration to maintain outer space for peaceful purposes.

UNOOSA, which works to promote international cooperation in the use of outer space to achieve development goals for the benefit of humankind, will commemorate another important anniversary this year – the 50th anniversary of the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS).

Tasked with developing a legal framework for the conduct of activities in outer space and also facilitating the use of space-based technology and its applications for developed and developing nations alike, the Committee met for the first time on 27 November 1961, the same year as Mr. Gagarin's flight.

In the last five decades, the Committee has developed five treaties and five principles governing the use of outer space. It has also helped States develop their indigenous capabilities to use space technology for sustainable development.

As part of the commemoration, exhibitions are taking place at the UN offices in New York and Vienna, where UNOOSA is based, and the Post of Russia and the UN Postal Administration are issuing souvenir stamps, including one featuring an iconic image of Mr. Gagarin.

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