Statement of the Association of Space Explorers
on NEOs
Scientific and Technical Subcommittee
of the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space

17 February 2016

Mr. Chairman,

First, let me congratulate you on your election as chair of STS COPUOS. We are confident that the work of the subcommittee will benefit from your experience and competent leadership.

Mr. Chairman and Distinguished Delegates,

The Association of Space Explorers, is holding the status of observer member with COPUOS since 1993. Our international Association, is comprised of over 400 space fliers from 37 different nations. As the only professional association for space fliers, ASE supports the advancement of space exploration by providing opportunities for communication among space professionals at the international level. ASE works closely with other space organizations to expand and invigorate international dialogue on several issues including the potential hazards of near earth objects, and provide its members with opportunities to communicate their unique perspective of Earth to help stimulate humanity's sense of responsibility for our home planet.

The Association of Space Explorers welcomes the opportunity to address today the STS COPUOS on the topic of Near-Earth Objects.

Since the beginning of our participation in 2005 in the United Nations' consideration of the near-Earth asteroid hazard, we have witnessed much progress in understanding the nature and extent of this ongoing geological process. The world's space agencies have provided new and exciting information about the population of near-Earth asteroids (numbering in the millions) that poses a collision hazard with our planet. Within the last year, the total of discovered NEOs has surpassed 13,000. New telescopes and search facilities expected within the next decade will greatly increase this number.

The United Nations' COPUOS and General Assembly have recognized asteroid impacts as a global concern, and endorsed an international, cooperative approach to reducing the risk of a future impact. Two UN-sanctioned groups: the International Asteroid Warning Network and the Space Missions Planning Advisory Group have been formed, which pool the ideas and resources of space agencies and scientific institutions around the world to detect hazardous objects and begin to develop the technical plans to divert them from a future collision with Earth. The ASE is gratified that our 2008 proposal for the formation of these two groups, included in our report "Asteroid threat – a Call for a global response", has come to fruition.

Despite the recent, rapid increase in NEO detections and orbit cataloging, the vast majority of NEOs remain undiscovered. The first, most important step in diverting rogue asteroids is to find those that might be on an orbit that threatens Earth. To increase the pace of NEO detection, the public must support greater efforts to discover those objects. The ASE believes widespread education and knowledge of the NEO hazard will lead to public support for an expanded detection effort.

Asteroid Day, we believe, is a good and worthy vehicle to educate the public and promote such worldwide action. Intended as an annual event for the general public on the anniversary of the 1908 Tunguska impact over Siberia, Asteroid Day presents information on the asteroid hazard and what efforts are being made to prevent a future impact. In particular, Asteroid Day also informs the public of actions taken by the UN COPUOS and its member states on this issue.

Because early warning of an impact is so important for preparing a timely, global response, Asteroid Day emphasizes the need for a faster pace of NEO discovery, using a combination of advanced ground-based and space-based telescopes. Dramatically increasing the discovery rate will mean launching into space an NEO-detecting telescope, sensitive to infrared radiation reflected from NEOs. International cooperation can play a key role in making the launch of such a telescope a reality.

To promote such cooperation, Asteroid Day promotes locally organized events around the globe, including community panel discussions, lectures, concerts, exhibits, and the showing of educational videos.

Asteroid Day 2015 promoted over 150 self-organized events worldwide. Its media campaign received over 4 billion media impressions around the globe, and generated thousands of media articles and reports. On social media, more than 50,000 tweets went out on Asteroid Day itself, and the #AsteroidDay theme itself maintained a high profile for five days around the event. Until now more than 100 organizations including important space agencies are already affiliated to the Asteroid Day movement. Those organizations and many others are appreciating the successful results of last year's Asteroid Day and the ambitious plans being laid for Asteroid Day 2016 and further.

Asteroid Day promises the following benefits:

- Increasing public awareness of the results of NEO population surveys and robotic exploration missions.
- Raising awareness in the public of the progress made by UN COPUOS and member state space agencies in preventing NEO impacts.
- Increasing support for cooperative, global action to prevent asteroid impacts.
- Raising support for a greatly increased pace of NEO detection.
- Raising public interest in and support for an international NEO deflection demonstration mission.

Having in mind the already demonstrated importance for humanity of the Asteroid Day movement, the Association of Space Explorers asks the member States of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space to support Asteroid Day's goals, and to propose that the United Nations General Assembly at its 71st session in 2016 declares the International Asteroid Day as the annual global observance. The purpose of such an Asteroid Day declaration is to promote and raise each year at the international level the awareness of NEO hazards, the potential for space science and technology to protect the humanity against future damaging impacts, and the need to act together to end the threat of an asteroid collision with Earth. Because June 30 was the date of the largest impact of an asteroid on Earth in historical times, we propose that the UN General Assembly resolve that the International Asteroid Day be celebrated and promoted annually on that date. To formalize our demand a CRP entitled "Proposal for a proclamation of the International Asteroid Day" is proposed for your consideration and support.

We thank you, Mr. Chairman and member delegates, for your kind attention.