

IISL COLLOQUIUM ON THE LAW OF OUTER SPACE (E7)
Moon and Mars Settlement: Open Legal Issues (2)

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THE LUNAR REGISTRY: AN ENHANCED REGISTRY OF SPACE OBJECTS AND ACTIVITIES

Abstract

“We’re Going Back” is much more than the mantra of the latest public relations material from the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). It is the reality of our future. At least 17 publicly announced Moon missions – both crewed and uncrewed – are planned within the next decade. Some companies are even seeking to monetize routine lunar transportation models. It’s not just a proliferation of activity, but a proliferation of actors, increasing diversity of those actors, and a diversity of the activities which they will pursue. In view of this reality, the truth is our current registration process for space activities is lacking. The Registration Convention requires the registration only of objects that are launched or to be launched into or beyond orbit. It is silent with respect to the payload that is delivered to another celestial body, and subsequent surface activities. Thus, even though there are more than 100 sites on the Moon which contain human-made material, the United Nations Registry records many less than that. For example, the Apollo 11 Lunar Module, Eagle, is not listed, nor are the paths traversed by modern rovers such as Yutu-2. Without transparency, we cannot effect coordination, which is necessary for sustained presence. It is not difficult to see that the concept of registration needs to be revitalized.

This presentation will discuss the need for a comprehensive register of objects and activities on the surface of other celestial bodies. It will examine relevant analogs in other domains, such as the International Telecommunications Union, International Seabed Authority, and Domain Name System. It will then offer an analysis of the practical implementation of such a Register, including the reporting hierarchy at the national and international level, the implementation of such reporting – utilizing current technology – and the proliferation of such a registry to all space actors and potential space actors. This presentation suggests that a new and modernized register should be open equally to commercial and state actors alike, and considers the problems and concerns that might be associated with this combination. We consider the information and other requirements that should be associated with such a register, in order to assure its efficacy and usefulness. Ultimately, this presentation seeks to spark meaningful discussion of the best way to utilize a register that will be a valuable and accessible tool to support the cooperative, sustainable and successful exploration of other celestial bodies.