



GOMUN 2025 OFFICIAL DOCUMENT

Study Guide

Special Political and Decolonization Committee

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Released October 2025, 1st Edition

COMMITTEE INTRODUCTION

The Special Political and Decolonization Committee is the 4th Committee of the United Nations General Assembly that tackles a broad range of issues, including disputes over territories due to decolonization, the use of outer space, and the effects of atomic radiation. The Committee meets annually at the United Nations Headquarters in New York to discuss resolutions related to peacekeeping. SPECPOL allows all Member States, petitioners, and other stakeholders to participate.

First topic: Indigenous Land rights and the Struggle for the Amazon

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TOPIC INTRODUCTION

The Amazon rainforest, also called the Earth's lungs, is home not only to unparalleled biodiversity but also to millions of people and hundreds of Indigenous communities. These communities face threats to the Amazon's environment from deforestation, illegal mining, agricultural expansion, and infrastructure projects, all of which jeopardize their territories and ways of life.

Indigenous land rights have been shown to benefit the environment, reducing deforestation and promoting higher forest growth in previously deforested areas. They are recognized by international law, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). However, enforcement of these laws is often weak, and disputes over land rights continue.

In recent years, there have been some positive developments in improving Indigenous land rights. However, Indigenous peoples still face many challenges. The Special Political and Decolonization Committee calls for the protection of Indigenous rights

KEY TERMS

- **Special Political and Decolonization Committee (SPECPOL)** – 4th Committee of the United Nations General Assembly
- **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)** – International legal instrument recognizing Indigenous peoples' rights to self-determination, land, and resources.
- **the International Labour Organisation (ILO)** – United Nations agency whose mandate is to advance social and economic justice by setting international labour standards
- **Amazon Fund** - an initiative created by the Brazilian Government and

managed by the National Bank for Economic and Social Development (BNDES)

- **Marco Temporal** – Brazilian legal theory that limits Indigenous land claims to areas occupied in 1988
- **Colonialism** – The historical process by which European powers occupied and exploited Indigenous territories
- **Terra Preta** – Fertile, human-made soil developed by Indigenous peoples in the Amazon

TOPIC OVERVIEW

The Amazon rainforest, which covers approximately **40% of the South American continent**, has been home to Indigenous peoples for thousands of years, who have integrated the rainforest into their lifestyles.

The rainforest was managed by Indigenous peoples for millennia through practices such as *terra preta*, highly fertile soil found across large areas of the Amazon, which is recognized as a product of **Indigenous soil management**.

During the 16th century, the colonial period, vast areas of the Amazon were colonized and claimed by European powers such as Portugal, the Netherlands, and England. Indigenous rights were severely limited, as communities were affected by wars and diseases or were integrated into colonial society through forced labor or religious missions.

The first large-scale farms were established in the 1960s. Many of these farms were unable to maintain soil fertility, leading to significant **land degradation**.

Infrastructure projects, such as the Trans-Amazonian Highway and other transportation initiatives, further altered the landscape and caused further **deforestation**.

Following the discovery of fossil fuels in the Amazon, **oil drilling** increased, peaking in the 1970s and 2000s, contributing to further deforestation. Currently, 9.4% of the territory is affected by oil fields, including indigenous territories and protected areas. **Mining** also represents a major threat. Nearly 10% of all the deforestation occurring in the Brazilian Amazon between 2005 and 2015 came

from mining activities.

The Amazon has become, and continues to be, heavily industrialized, resulting in deforestation and the loss of habitats for numerous plant and animal species, as well as Indigenous communities.

Indigenous land rights have been shown to benefit the environment, reducing deforestation and promoting higher forest growth in previously deforested areas. Recognizing these rights not only supports Indigenous communities but also contributes to the preservation of the Amazon's ecosystem.

Despite recognition in international law, Indigenous land rights continue to face significant challenges. In 2023, Brazil experienced disputes over the *Marco Temporal* ("Time Limit"), a legal framework setting a cutoff date for recognition of Indigenous land claims. While the Supreme Court deemed it unconstitutional, the Brazilian Congress passed federal legislation enshrining it, thereby weakening Indigenous rights.

Indigenous peoples still face obstacles as the Amazon rainforest continues to be threatened by industrialization.

TIMELINE

16th – 18th century – Colonisation of Amazon rainforest by European powers

1960s – Large-scale agriculture and infrastructure projects

1970s – 2000s – Expansion of oil drilling and mining intensifies environmental degradation

1988 – Brazilian Constitution formally recognizes Indigenous land rights, establishing legal protections and demarcation requirements.

2007 – UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) affirms international recognition of Indigenous rights to land, culture, and self-determination

2010s – Research confirms Indigenous-managed territories reduce deforestation

2012 – Brazil passes the Forest Code revision that reduced the area required for legal reserves on rural private properties

2023 – Brazil's *Marco Temporal* debate

2024 – Peru grants a record number of Indigenous land titles

2025 – Colombia issued a decree that recognises the right of indigenous peoples to establish autonomous territorial entities with their own governments

PAST ACTION

169 - Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989

Convened at Geneva by the Governing Body of the International Labour Office. It is a binding international treaty that specifically addresses Indigenous rights, including land rights.

UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)

high-level advisory body to the Economic and Social Council that regularly addresses Amazon-related concerns INPFII has raised awareness on Amazon deforestation, violence against Indigenous peoples, and land rights violations

Establishment of Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

It is a special rapporteur appointed by the United Nations after a 2001 mandate of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and produces reports highlighting indigenous peoples rights violations.

Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO)

Establishment of ACTO formed by the eight Amazonian countries, becoming the only socio-environmental block in Latin America. It seeks to foster balanced development in Amazonian territories, ensuring collective action yields equitable and mutually beneficial outcomes for the region's sustainable development.

COUNTRY POSITIONS

Brazil

Brazil has the largest portion of the Amazon. Indigenous land rights are recognized in the 1988 Constitution, but between 2019 and 2022, protections

were weakened and the demarcation of Indigenous territories was largely frozen. During this period, agribusiness and mining were strongly promoted. Disputes over Indigenous land rights continue, especially around the Marco Temporal law.

Colombia

Colombia recognizes the importance of Indigenous peoples and their role in protecting the Amazon's biodiversity. The government has issued a decree granting Indigenous territorial autonomy and often rules in favor of Indigenous land claims. Despite this, Indigenous communities still face violence and other serious threats.

United States (USA)

The United States sees the struggle for the Amazon as global both an environmental and human rights issue. It supports Indigenous land rights by funding Indigenous organizations and initiatives, including through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

France

France supports Indigenous land rights, for example by contributing to the Amazon Fund.

China

China's main focus in the Amazon is economical. It invests in extractive industries and infrastructure projects through loans and partnerships.

QUESTIONS THE RESOLUTION MUST ANSWER

1. *How can countries make sure Indigenous land rights are respected and enforced, so private companies, illegal miners, or other actors cannot violate them?*
2. *What strategies can governments use to develop the Amazon in a way that supports the economy without harming Indigenous communities or the environment?*
3. *What practical steps can be taken to clearly define and protect Indigenous territories, preventing illegal encroachment or land grabs?*
4. *How can Indigenous leaders and communities be kept safe from violence, intimidation, or forced displacement while defending their lands?*

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Second topic: The Influence of Private Space Companies on Global Policy and Decision-Making

Jakub Havlík

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

The governance of outer space and regulation of space activities have been traditionally the role of a government. However, during the last decade, private companies such as SpaceX, Blue Origin and Axiom Space have transformed the landscape of space exploration and commercialization, leading in a rise of voices calling for transforming the status of outer space from one beyond property and sovereignty to a commodity shaped by modern capitalist market economy, such as through the institution of private property. Unlike the cold war era, when space-related activities were monopolized by the government, the rise of these private enterprises is now reshaping the global policies and international decision making in this matter.^[1]

KEY TERMS

- **NewSpace** – The term NewSpace refers to the emerging wave of private space companies that are transforming the current landscape of space industry (in contrast to government-led “Old Space”).
- **Outer Space Treaty** – treaty signed in 1967 that became a cornerstone of Space Law internationally.
- **Starlink** - A system of satellites created by SpaceX with a goal of providing high-speed internet worldwide.
- **Orbital debris** – Also called “space junk”, are human-made objects left in Earth’s orbit that no longer serves a purpose.
- **SpaceX** – A company founded by Elon Musk in 2002 that stands currently as the world’s biggest private space company.

TOPIC OVERVIEW

During the last decade, private contractors have transformed the traditionally state-centered space. They no longer possess only a role of passive contractors, but have become active stakeholders that influence global space, exploration and development. Though many critiques against privatized space exploration, mostly against its risky and capitalistic nature, If handled correctly, it can bring many great benefits to governments and to mankind as a whole. These include allowing room for more altruistic actions by government space agencies and the benefits from increased space exploration as a whole.^[2]

While private companies are not new to space exploration, their prominence in worldwide space-related efforts has increased rapidly in the last decade. Biggest government space agencies, such as NASA, rely heavily on these private contractors.^[2] In May of 2020, SpaceX brought American astronauts to space from American soil for the first time in almost 10 years.^[2] This and many other such cases show the shift in a strategy of NASA and other government space agencies. Reduction in costs, rapid increase in space exploration efforts and many other benefits are the reason why NASA's current budget has shifted to significantly rely on these private companies.

Recent space policies and national laws have displayed the power of private space sector, such as in the case of NASA's Principles for Cooperation in the Civil Exploration and Use of the Moon, Mars, Comets, and Asteroids for Peaceful Purposes, known as the 'Artemis Accords'. This set of principles relating to space exploration signed by 30 states was proposed by NASA in 2020. One of the policies mentioned is that the Artemis Accords aim for a policy and, eventually, a legal environment facilitating ownership rights of space resources. This raised a concern in the international community whether such an objective is contrary to the spirit of international space law.^[1]

TIMELINE

- 1967** – Outer Space Treaty (OST) was signed (*refer to “Past Action”*)
- 1984** – U.S. Commercial Space Launch Act was signed (*refer to “Past Action”*)
- 1990s** – Companies like Iridium and Globalstar attempt to build private satellite networks, sparking early regulatory debates.
- 2002** – SpaceX was founded
- 2004** – Commercial Space Launch Amendments act (U.S) was signed (*refer to “Past Action”*)
- 2008** – NASA Commercial Orbital Transportation Services, first public-private partnership with SpaceX was established
- 2012** – SpaceX Dragon docks becomes the first private spacecraft to resupply ISS
- 2015** – U.S. Commercial Space Launch Competitiveness Act was signed (*refer to “Past Action”*)
- 2016** – Luxembourg becomes the first European country to give companies rights over extracted space resources with Luxembourg Space Resources Law
- 2017** – SpaceX and OneWeb begin launching thousands of satellites, creating Starlink
- 2020** – Artemis Accords announced (*refer to “Past Action”*)
- 2022-now** – Ukraine war begins, with SpaceX's Starlink becoming critical to Ukrainian defense and communications

PAST ACTION

Outer Space Treaty (OST, 1967)

Cornerstone of space law. Declares space the “province of all mankind”, forbidding sovereignty claims and making states responsible for private actors under their jurisdiction.

Moon agreement (1979)

Declares the moon and its resources the “common heritage of mankind”, being relevant to private mining debates.

U.S. Commercial Space Launch Act (1984, amended 2004)

First major U.S. law enabling private launch companies. With a purpose of encouraging the private sector to participate in space exploration by creating a legal framework for commercial space launch, later amended to include human space flight.

U.S. Commercial Space Launch Competitiveness Act (2015)

Grants U.S. companies right to resources extracted from celestial bodies, sparking global debate on property rights in space.

Artemis Accords (2020)

U.S.-initiated set of non-binding, bilateral agreements signed by more than 30 nations tackling problems related to space exploration. acknowledges commercial actors (SpaceX, Blue Origin, Axiom Space) as integral partners in exploration efforts.

UN COPUOS Long-Term Sustainability guidelines (2019)

Voluntary guidelines for safe and sustainable space activities initiated by the United Nations.

COUNTRY POSITIONS

China

China holds a similar stand to this matter as to most other market-related issues, therefore it promotes state-led exploration (CSNSA, tiangong station, Chang'e missions), but has recently opened up to private startups under government supervision (Galactic Energy, iSpace). It is also developing the GuoWang mega-constellation as a counter to Starlink.

Russia

Russia favors state-led space programs (Roscosmos), seeing space as more strategic rather than commercial. It also holds a position as a strong critic of Artemis Accords, marking them as U.S.-centric and a violation of the Outer Space Treaty.

United States (USA)

The United States is strongly supportive of private space companies. It is the leader of NewSpace^[3] and has encouraged these efforts through many acts and laws (*refer to Past Action*)

European Union (EU) and European Space Agency (ESA) member states

The EU, respectively ESA, is supportive of private space companies, but also very cautious in this matter. It aims to create its own NewSpace ecosystem (Rocket Factory Augsburg, OHB, ispace Europe). It is also planning its own satellite constellation to reduce reliance on U.S. providers such as Musk's Starlink.

India

India has been historically dominated by the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO), but has recently liberalized space sector rules, allowing private companies under the IN-SPACe regulatory body. As an answer to this, many Indian startups are emerging, such as Skyroot or Agnikul.

United Nations

The UN is increasingly pressured, mostly by smaller states, to establish guidelines regarding these issues. Currently, it struggles to adapt existing treaties to the NewSpace reality and create new ones.

QUESTIONS THE RESOLUTION MUST ANSWER

1. *Should we regulate private space contractors internationally? How so?*
2. *Should the approach to this matter stay international or should countries have a right to individually decide their policies?*
3. *How should we approach space exploration in the future years?*
4. *How should we approach the legislation regarding extraction of resources from space?*
5. *Should space stay a public asset, or should we consider its privatization?*

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