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# A New Agenda For Space

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By Michael J. Mackowski

The crisp blue skies of a Missouri autumn formed a backdrop to the hyperbolic roof of the McDonnell Planetarium in St. Louis, site of a one-day conference on "The Uses of Outer Space for the Solution of Earth-Bound Problems." The program, held on Oct. 26, was sponsored by the St. Louis Chapter of the United Nations Association and featured a top level slate of guest speakers.

The tone of the conference was set by NASA Administrator James M. Beggs and Prof. Yash Pal, Secretary-General of UNISPACE 82. The role of the UN and international efforts in general were the main topics of the day's lectures and discussions. The current status of the American space program and where it might be headed were also on the agenda.

Besides Beggs and Pal, the panels included such notables as space scientist James Van Allen, John F. Yardley, president of the McDonnell Douglas Astronautics Company, Gordon Law, senior analyst for the congressional Office of Technology Assessment, Wilfred Mellors, European Space Agency representative to the U.S., Bert Cowlan, a consultant on international telecommunications, Robert M. Walker, professor of physics at Washington University in St. Louis, and Raymond E. Arvidson, a planetary scientist, also from Washington University.

Beggs looked forward to new international activity in space and stressed the importance of the Space Shuttle, stating that "without exaggeration, we are about to become a space-faring civilization." As the chief American delegate to the UNISPACE-82 Conference held in Vienna this summer, he noted the media's over-emphasis of the question of the militarization of space at that meeting, while in fact, many other important issues were addressed there.

The primary purpose of UNISPACE-82 was to reach agreement on policies and programs for international cooperation in the peaceful uses of space. While the industrialized nations are currently taking the most advantage of space, it is develop-

ing nations where the uses of space technology can have its biggest impact. At UNISPACE-82 these countries expressed their concern over such issues as access to geostationary orbit, direct broadcast "intrusion," privacy of and access to remote sensing data, and the threat of an arms race in space.

All the speakers generally had a positive view of the future of man's activities in space. Beggs noted that with continuing advancements in technology and increasing requirements for space services by more and more nations, additional emphasis will be put on the space domain for addressing earth-bound needs.

The Third World countries acknowledge the great potential for space, according to Pal, but "new pathways in the wilderness" are needed to share the benefits more widely. The UNISPACE-82 conference established no major new initiatives (agencies, institutes, committees, etc.) towards this end, yet Pal felt this was actually a positive accomplishment.

Instead of funneling money and talent into a potentially cumbersome and ineffective bureaucratic entity, the UNISPACE-82 delegates recommended an increased emphasis on international cooperative efforts to disseminate space technology where it is most needed and to expand the existing United Nations committees on outer space affairs.

The needs of developing countries are different than those of the major space powers, according to Pal, and it will take a new point of view and innovative solutions to meet these needs. Sophisticated multi-beam communication satellites in geostationary orbit may not be the most cost-effective way to establish a simple message network for a country comprised of small, remote towns and villages. Pal suggested that a store-dump satellite in low earth orbit would be adequate to quickly provide an easy-to-use and effective electronic mail service.

Unbounded optimism was not the unanimous opinion of all the St. Louis conference participants. Cowlan noted

that the United States has no official telecommunications policy, present tariff policies are outdated, and no one is considering how to deal with competition posed to telecommunications by microcomputers, cable networks, and videodiscs.

The near demise of America's planetary exploration program was briefly addressed by both Walker and Arvidson, but Van Allen really drove the point home at his dinner speech: he named the Space Shuttle program as the villain in this complex scenario where the planetary program was essentially killed in the summer of 1981.

In the bygone days of big budgets, NASA could afford to support major efforts in all three areas of manned space, applications, and space science. Under the current economic restrictions, however, the Shuttle gets first priority (due to its high visibility and military requirements), applications programs survive reasonably well (because of easy-to-justify earth benefits), while planetary science is deemed expendable, he said. Since the summer of last year, however, the administration has been convinced to restore at least a minimal space science program. Van Allen, Walker, and Arvidson agreed that although it's a far cry from what we are capable of doing, there is hope for a mild resurgence in planetary exploration in the next few years.

The spirit of this United Nations Association conference might be best described as guarded optimism. The global space community is growing, and the needs of each of its members are different. Planning activities in space is no longer merely an engineering challenge, but complex political, economic, military and societal issues must be addressed. A space program can't be justified by spin-offs alone. As Cowlan put it, "technology may be the answer, but what is the question?" ★

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