

As Space Traffic Grows, UN Calls for More International Cooperation

夜空を見上げたとき、その上でどれくらいの物が動いているかを意識したことはありますか。普段は意識しにくい宇宙の世界でも、利用の仕方が少しずつ変わってきているようです。最近では、国連も宇宙の使い方について声を上げています。国や立場の異なる人たちが同じ空間を使うとき、どんな考え方やルールが必要になるのでしょうか。あなたなら何を重視しますか。



1. Article

Read the following article aloud.

As the amount of space traffic continues to grow, the United Nations is calling for increased international cooperation to improve safety.

Continued deployment of satellites and sharp increases in space [debris](#) over the years have resulted in the crowding of low Earth orbit. Space experts and industry leaders say this has created safety risks that will worsen if the problem is not dealt with.

A U.N. gathering of experts in October called for more sharing of information about orbital space objects, as well as creation of an international process to follow and manage them. The meeting was organized by the U.N.'s Office for Outer Space Affairs.

Data from the American-based company Slingshot Aerospace suggests there are more than 14,000 satellites around the world in low Earth [orbit](#). That number includes about 3,500 satellites that are currently inactive, Reuters news agency reports.

In addition, there are about 120 million pieces of orbital debris left over from spacecraft launches, crashes or other causes. Only a few thousand of those are large enough to follow, or track.

"There's no time to lose on space traffic [coordination](#)," the director of the U.N.'s Office for Outer Space Affairs, Aarti Holla-Maini, told Reuters. She added, "With so many objects being launched into space, we have to do everything we can to ensure space safety, and that means facilitating the sharing of information between operators."

Holla-Maini explained that such coordination should involve both public and private organizations. The goal is to take steps to avoid crashes between space objects orbiting in low Earth orbit. She added that this area of space must remain safe to prevent costly difficulties to technologies that drive worldwide communication, navigation and scientific exploration.

Currently, there is no centralized system to help prevent such problems. It has also been difficult for organizations to agree on a set of guidelines aimed at improving safety in low Earth orbit. While some countries are willing to share data, others object because of security or privacy concerns.

There have been several examples of these issues over the past year. A Chinese launcher rocket exploded in August, creating thousands of pieces of debris in low Earth orbit. In June, an unused Russian satellite exploded, releasing thousands of metal pieces. That incident forced astronauts on the International Space Station to briefly take shelter.

Low Earth orbit is the most crowded area of space. This is because it offers a balance between cost and proximity, making it a popular target for the quickly growing private space industry.

It is estimated that many more satellites – tens of thousands more – will enter low-Earth orbit in the coming years. One [prediction](#) by Canada-based space tracking company NorthStar Earth & Space suggests the possible [financial](#) risk of space object collisions is likely to reach \$556 million over five years.

NorthStar's chief executive, Stewart Bain, told Reuters the situation had reached "a critical point" for establishing rules to cover space objects in low Earth orbit. Bain noted that SpaceX's Starlink is launching thousands of satellites per year and China and others are preparing to follow. Such expansion could threaten the load capacity of objects in low Earth orbit, he said.

Reuters reported this story. Bryan Lynn adapted the report for VOA Learning English.

2. Key phrases and vocabulary

First repeat after your tutor and then read aloud by yourself.

1. debris (n.) broken pieces of something

After the typhoon, debris covered the streets of the city.

2. orbit (n.) a curved path around a planet or star

The moon follows its orbit around Earth at an average distance of 384,000 kilometers..

3. coordination (n.) organizing different parts so they work well together

The football team showed good coordination during the game.

4. prediction (n.) a statement about what will happen in the future

Ingrid's prediction about the weather was correct, and the cold weather continued.

5. financial (adj.) relating to money or money matters

The smartphone company's financial report showed a quarterly loss.

3. Questions

Read the questions aloud and answer them.

1. What is causing the crowding in low Earth orbit?
2. What kinds of objects make up space debris?
3. Why is there no centralized system for space safety?
4. Why do you think international cooperation is important for managing space traffic?
5. How might increased space traffic affect life on Earth?