

Regional Approaches to Outer Space: Notes from the 29th APRSAF Meeting

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The 29th Asia-Pacific Regional Space Agency Forum (APRSAF) meeting reconfirmed the forum's vital role in regional space initiatives that can further help global coordination in space activities. This report presents such perspective from an intra-region participant's point of view. It highlights key discussions from the 2023 plenary session, emphasizing the Space Policy and Law Working Group's contributions. The importance of the APRSAF's National Space Legislation Initiative (NSLI) in harmonizing space laws and the involvement of young scholars in policy shaping are underscored. The report observes the opportunities and challenges in regional space cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region.

Keywords: APRSAF, Asia-Pacific, regional, space diplomacy.

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Introduction

APRSAF, in cooperation with the Indonesian government, has managed to run its 29th meeting was held in Jakarta from 19-22 February 2023. The meeting has attracted many participants from across the space community in the Asia-Pacific. It demonstrated the forum's vital role in regional space collaboration and how it can be beneficial for greater goods in global level.

This report briefly reviews the APRSAF and its agenda in its 29th meeting. More attention was put particularly on the Space Policy and Law Working Group (SPLWG) as well as its relatively-new National Space Legislation Initiative (NSLI) and Young Scholars Essay Competition. In the end, some key takeaways are discussed as this report's conclusion.

APRSAF and Its 29th Meeting

The Asia-Pacific Regional Space Agency Forum (APRSAF) was established in 1993. It is a Japan-initiated non-legally binding forum for space agencies and other public/private bodies of the region and beyond. The forum's main aim is to enhance space activities in the Asia-Pacific region.

In 2023, its 29th meeting was held in Jakarta from 19-22 September 2023. In addition to the plenary meetings, it organizes five working groups, namely *Satellite Applications*, *Enhancement of Space Capability*, *Space Education*, *Space Frontier*, *Space Policy and Law* (SPLWG), as well as Space Industry Workshop. The forum's meetings also showed its supports towards the establishment of international projects, both among entities inside the region and around the globe. The meetings of the working groups preceded the plenary sessions.

Of all working groups, the SPLWG had a strong focus on the issues of space law and policies. Its two-day meetings consist of various presentations and discussion sessions. The presentation sessions include the topics of Indonesian space law; Space Sustainability Rating; industry in the Region; Common Assessment for Space-based Policy; Space for SDGs; ASEAN Space Agency; and Philippines on space sustainability. More sessions include the discussion on the topics of a sustainable public-private partnership for the sustainable use of outer space; accelerating the contribution to SDGs in the Asia Pacific; APRSAF's perspectives on International Space Traffic Management.

A key highlight should be on a session discussing the progress of the National Space Legislation Initiative (NSLI). This initiative was established on 26th APRSAF meeting in 2019. Its main objectives are to promote information sharing and mutual learning on national space legislation and policies in APAC region and to enhance capacity to draft and implement national space legislation and policies based on international norms. To achieve that, the main task is to jointly draft a report on the status of national space legislations of NSLI members for submission to UNCOPUOS. This initiative has involved at least thirteen Asia-Pacific countries.

The NSLI has achieved the end of its second phase and the achievement was reported on this meeting. The second phase was chaired by Yumiko Tateshita (JAXA/Japan) and Yunita Permatasari (BRIN/Indonesia). They have managed to submit the "Report on the status of the national space legislation of countries of the Asia-Pacific Regional Space Agency Forum National Space Legislation Initiative, second phase" to the Legal Subcommittee of the UNCOPUOS in 2023. They reemphasized that NSLI's work is based on a UNGA resolution "Recommendations on National Space Legislation" in 2013. In the process, the initiative's study group discussions and report writing based on special questionnaire and "information form" completed by NSLI participating organizations. Following this achievement, the third phase has been launched at APRSAF-29 and its activity will be for 2 years by APRSAF-31 in 2025. Their report was also complemented by a keynote speech from UNOOSA's representative as well as country-reports on the "Authorisation and Supervision" of space launch from Indonesia, Australia, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Philippines.

Another special session was the Young Scholars Essay Competition presentations for which this report's author participated in it. This competition has been held since last year and this year's topic was on "Private Roles and Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific." In these sessions, essays were presented around the topic: historical role of space-based private entities; how they can do for safety-sustainability; crowdsourcing; and innovative ownership to prevent monopoly using blockchain technologies. Discussions took regionally-relevant cases that was

probably rarely discussed in global context. This review's author's essay won the Grand Prize after presenting a historical lesson from Indonesian private companies' role through space activities.



Figure 1 Some pictures of the Author's participation in the 29th APRSAF Meeting.

Following fruitful working groups sessions, the Meeting held two-days plenary sessions. Each working group presented their reports. Countries also gave their national reports, including Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, and Vietnam. Some discussions also were held on the plenary session: accelerating space economies through regional partner; sharing the practices for ensuring the sustainable use of outer space; how to manage and respond to common regional issues through partnerships with diverse players; nurturing future generation for sustainable development of space activities in the Asia-Pacific region. Prof Anupam Ojha OBE from the UK Space Agency and University of Leicester participated in several sessions. After summary reports being presented at the end, the Meeting announced its 30th session in Perth, Australia, for 2024.

Key Takeaways

It was observed that regional approaches could help coordinate countries in shaping international space law or norms before going into global-level discussions. Particularly, the NSLI has demonstrated the possibility to harmonize national law-making softly through actionable regional cooperations. In addition to such programmatic approach, the Meeting also open possibility to hearing “not-so-loud” voices on space legal or political issues from future generations of the region which are relatively unheard in global level. However, regional challenges still present based on two observations: (a) the presence of Taiwan Space Agency/TAXA alongside the apparent absence of People Republic of China representatives; (b) considering another regional alternative, that is China-led the Asia-Pacific Space Cooperation Organization (APSCO). There is some hope for more participations in and results from the 30th Meeting in Australia.