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Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space

Note verbale dated 25 November 2022 from the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations and other International Organizations in Vienna addressed to the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs*

The Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations and other International Organizations in Vienna presents its compliments to the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs and has the honour to inform the latter of the illegal Internet operation of Starlink within the territory of the Islamic Republic of Iran by the Space Exploration Technologies Corporation of the United States of America (SpaceX), with United States Government support. In this connection, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran would like to notify the following.

Starlink operated by SpaceX is apparently a global network of low-orbit satellites that bypasses the terrestrial Internet, and has illegally activated its satellites over different parts of the Islamic Republic of Iran's territory since September 2022, after the United States Government cleared the way for American tech companies to operate against the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In this vein, Starlink receivers have begun to be smuggled into Iran, in hopes of providing a backup Internet.

The Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies (the Outer Space Treaty), in its article VI, explicitly provides that: "States Parties to the Treaty shall bear international responsibility for national activities in outer space, including the Moon and other celestial bodies, whether such activities are carried on by governmental agencies or by non-governmental entities, and for assuring that national activities are carried out in conformity with the provisions set forth in the present Treaty. The activities of non-governmental entities in outer space, including the Moon and other celestial bodies, shall require authorization and continuing supervision by the appropriate State Party to the Treaty."

Furthermore, the "Regulation Governing Landing Rights Regarding Provisions of Satellite Services in the Islamic Republic of Iran" was formally submitted to the United States Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and SpaceX Corporation in a note verbale dated 25 October 2022 through the Embassy of Switzerland in Tehran, serving as the Protecting Power of the United States in Iran. Such regulation was already communicated to the United States Federal Communications Commission (FCC) with a copy to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

* The information is reproduced in the form in which it was received.



As a result, the ITU secretariat is aware of the above-mentioned communication to FCC.

The Islamic Republic of Iran reiterates that any legal operation of mega-constellations such as SpaceX's Starlink within its territory must be in compliance with the "Regulation Governing Landing Rights Regarding Provisions of Satellite Services in the Islamic Republic of Iran", which is available on the website of the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Therefore, as long as the National Regulations Governing Landing Rights Regarding Provisions of Satellite Services in the Islamic Republic of Iran is not complied with by SpaceX, as a legal person under the domestic jurisdiction of the United States Government, its satellite Internet services within the territory of the Islamic Republic of Iran are illegal and are considered to be intervening in the internal affairs of Iran in accordance with Article 2, paragraph 7, of the Charter of the United Nations, which has to be observed by all United Nations Member States.

Furthermore, such act is a flagrant violation of international law, in particular the inviolability of the "sovereign equality" of all United Nations Members in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. The Islamic Republic of Iran holds the United States directly responsible for such unlawful measure caused by SpaceX.

The conduct and action of SpaceX is a blatant breach of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence and sovereign jurisdiction of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which includes refraining from complying with the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies (the Outer Space Treaty of 1967), as well as the "Regulation Governing Landing Rights Regarding Provisions of Satellite Services in the Islamic Republic of Iran".

While Starlink claims to be a civilian programme providing global high-speed Internet services, its strong military link with the United States military indicates its military purposes that threaten the national security of all States including Iran, and its objective is in line with the military policy of the United States to reinvigorate the arms race in outer space.

The Islamic Republic of Iran reserves its inherent right to respond, in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations, to any national security threat posed by SpaceX activities in Iran or wrongful act that targets its national interests, decisively and proportionately and whenever it deems necessary.

It would be appreciated if the present letter could be circulated as an official document of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space.

The Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations and other International Organizations in Vienna avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs the assurances of its highest consideration.
