

## Space

### Scientists call on UN to help solve Earth's space junk problem

An international group of researchers is calling on the United Nations to include the protection of Earth's orbit in the U.N.'s sustainable development goals.

The researchers — led by experts from NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, the University of Plymouth in the U.K. and the University of Texas at Austin — think that adding space to the U.N.'s Agenda for Sustainable Development space would strengthen the case for protection, which has become a pressing topic in recent years.

The advent of megaconstellations — fleets of hundreds or thousands of small satellites that provide internet connectivity or monitor the planet from above — has led to an exponential rise in satellite numbers. Some 15 years ago, barely a thousand satellites orbited the planet. That number has increased more than tenfold since and is expected to continue growing. As satellites reach the ends of their missions, they turn into dangerous debris that could collide with other orbiting objects, thus creating masses of debris fragments.

"Adding a Sustainable Development Goal [SDG] specifically for space would be a transformative step in safeguarding one of Earth's most vital environments," Melissa Quinn, general manager at space situational awareness company Slingshot Aerospace, who is part of the initiative, told Space.com. "Space is no longer a limitless frontier; it is a finite resource under increasing pressure from human activity."

In the nearly 70 years since the launch of history's first satellite — Russia's Sputnik — humankind has come to rely on space technology in many aspects of modern life, including TV broadcasts, internet connectivity and satellite navigation.

"This isn't just about protecting space for its own sake," Quinn said. "It's about ensuring that the systems we rely on daily remain resilient, equitable and accessible for generations to come. A dedicated SDG would catalyze the global cooperation needed to meet this challenge head-on."