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Position Paper on Declaration of Principles Concerning the Conduct of the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI) – (2026 Update)

Preamble

The International Academy of Astronautics (IAA) has adopted these Principles to guide individuals, institutions, organisations, and other entities participating in the scientific Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI), that is, the search based on astronomy and related disciplines for technosignatures¹ or evidence of past or present intelligent life and technology beyond Earth. These updated Principles were developed by the IAA SETI Committee during 2022-2025, and subsequently approved by a recent vote of the Committee.

The purpose of this Declaration is as follows: to affirm our commitment to conduct the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence in a scientifically and academically rigorous manner; to establish best practices, principles and guidelines for scientists to confirm putative evidence of intelligent extraterrestrial beings; to provide guidance to the scientific community for the announcement of a confirmed SETI detection which balances the community imperative of providing timely and accurate information to a wide-ranging audience, with appropriate consideration for the safety and exposure of individual scientists involved; and to proactively inform the global public of these procedures and guidelines.

The commitments in this Declaration are made with the recognition that the scientific and communications landscapes are ever-changing, and this Declaration will be supplemented with Best Practices Guidelines, including guidance concerning safety for researchers, and a Code of Conduct that will be periodically re-examined and updated. This Declaration and any supplemental Guidelines and Codes will be placed on file with the International Academy of Astronautics and made available on the IAA website [iaaspace.org].

¹ ‘Technosignatures’ are defined as observable evidence of technology built or utilised by extraterrestrial beings, e.g. narrow-band radio signals, laser emission, infrared excess associated with large-scale energy usage, anomalies in astronomical measurements due to megastructures etc., or an artefact. Technosignatures would indicate the presence of intelligent extraterrestrial life. This Declaration applies to the search for intelligent extraterrestrial life, not to extraterrestrial life in general, nor to unidentified anomalous phenomena (UAP) in the Earth’s atmosphere.

Principles

1. Handling Candidate Evidence:

- In the event of a putative detection of extraterrestrial intelligence, the discoverer should endeavour to make all efforts to authenticate and substantiate the detection, using the resources available to the discoverer and in collaboration with other investigators. Such efforts should ideally include, but not be limited to, independent observations or other examinations by multiple facilities and by more than one organisation utilising different instrumentation and methods.
- Information about candidate signals or other potential detections should be handled with extreme care, recognising that initial findings may be incomplete or ambiguous, requiring thorough analysis and confirmation, which could be a lengthy process, and that follow-up study may not yield definitive conclusions. It is crucial to uphold the highest standards of scientific responsibility and integrity throughout this process, including recognition of the interests of humanity in the discovery. Best practices and tools in science communication should be employed to clearly convey the importance and significance of candidate discoveries to non-specialist audiences.

2. Communicating and Sharing Information:

- SETI practitioners and their institutions and organisations should be free to present reports on activities and results in public and professional fora. Individual practitioners shall have the right to decline from engaging directly or continually with the media, including social media, but shall use their best efforts to ensure that their organisation or institution provides updates on their science. Institutions and organisations should take appropriate steps for the safety of their researchers, and to protect them from negative professional repercussions.
- Institutions and organisations should be responsive to reasonable requests from news organisations, social media platforms, and other public communications media. Responses to inquiries should be prompt, accurate and honest.
- There is no obligation to disclose verification efforts until a discovery is confirmed. If a candidate technosignature is discovered, communication about ongoing observations and analyses may be necessary to dispel rumours and provide accurate and reliable information. Similarly, if analysis determines that a previously reported candidate technosignature is not extraterrestrial in origin, this should be promptly disclosed and clearly communicated.
- Speculative or unconfirmed statements and conclusions should be clearly identified as such.
- In their engagements with news and other media, institutions and organisations should provide accurate and timely information.

3. Communicating Verification:

- If the verification process satisfies Principle 1 and confirms – by the consensus of the other investigators involved and to a degree of certainty judged by the discoverers to be credible – that a signal or other

evidence is due to extraterrestrial intelligence, the discoverers or their organisations or institutions should promptly report this conclusion in a full, complete and open manner to the public, the scientific community, and the Secretary General of the United Nations. The discoverers or their organisation or institution should have the opportunity to make the first public announcement.

- The verification report should be peer-reviewed, and include the underlying data, the data analysis process and results of the verification efforts, any conclusions and interpretations, and any detected information content. This report should follow best practices in risk communication. This formal verification report should also be made to relevant organisations, including the International Academy of Astronautics, the International Astronomical Union, the Committee on Space Research (COSPAR) of the International Science Council, the International Institute of Space Law, the International Telecommunications Union, and the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, the Office of Outer Space Affairs, and other relevant U.N. bodies. Open access publication of verification data is encouraged.

4. Monitoring, Archiving and Data Accessibility:

- All data bearing on the evidence of extraterrestrial intelligence, together with the data analysis methods and code, should be preserved and disseminated to the international scientific community through refereed journal publications, meetings, conferences, websites appropriate for long-term archiving, and other appropriate means.
- The discovery should be continuously monitored, and best practices for the safe, reliable, and resilient handling of data should be employed. All data bearing on the evidence of extraterrestrial intelligence, including derived data products, should be recorded, and securely stored and archived to the greatest extent feasible and practicable, in at least two repositories in different geographic locations, and in a form that will make it accessible to observers and to the scientific community for replication of results and further analysis. The use of recognised international repositories and open standard formats is encouraged.

5. Data and Frequency Protection:

- Evidence of detection should be protected utilising best scientific practices, including tamper-proof records, and precautionary protocols. If the evidence of detection is in the form of electromagnetic signals, international agreement should be sought to protect the appropriate frequencies by exercising the extraordinary procedures established within the International Telecommunication Union.

6. Post-Detection Protocol:

- The IAA SETI Committee will maintain a Post-Detection Sub-Committee to assist and advise in matters that may arise in the event of a confirmed detection, and to support the scientific and public analysis by offering guidance, interpretation, and discussion of the wider implications of the discovery. This sub-committee should include international representation with science, ethics, law, social sciences, and communications professionals, as well as communications researchers with expertise in science and risk communication.

- The IAA will support and assist the Post-Detection Sub-Committee with engagements with social media platforms and news organisations to responsively and effectively aid in the dissemination of accurate and reliable information.
- The IAA will collaborate with interdisciplinary researchers and working groups dedicated to Post-Detection issues and focus on subjects such as best practices for public communication about technosignature science.

7. Communications with ETI following confirmed detection:

- SETI practitioners should cooperate with appropriate international consultations to consider whether a potential response to a confirmed detection of extraterrestrial intelligence should be made, and if so, its contents. Pending the outcome of such consultations, no reply should be sent. These consultations should be conducted through the United Nations and other broadly representative international bodies. The specific procedures for such consultations are to be outlined in a separate agreement, declaration, or arrangement to ensure a coordinated and responsible approach².

8. Ethical and Legal Considerations:

- SETI practitioners shall adhere to the highest ethical standards, ensuring cooperation, honesty, and integrity in all aspects of their work. They will collaborate with international legal authorities to establish clear frameworks for managing the dissemination of information about potential extraterrestrial detections and comply with relevant laws and regulations. SETI practitioners shall collaborate with ethicists in establishing and following ethical standards for the handling of any putative and/or confirmed detected evidence of extraterrestrial intelligence, including transparency and responsibility towards the global community.

This Declaration replaces the previous *Declaration of Principles Concerning the Conduct of the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI)* adopted by the International Academy of Astronautics in 2010.

Point of Contact: Inquiries concerning these Principles, or related matters of SETI research and post-detection policy, should be directed through the official contact form of the IAA, available at: <https://forms.gle/8g7cM4QL616d9Wwr7>

Dated: June 1st, 2026

² This Declaration does not address the separate and distinct subject of messaging to extraterrestrial intelligence in advance of a confirmed detected extraterrestrial signal (METI).