

International astronaut will be invited on future NASA moon landing

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Artemis II crew members from left, Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover, Christina Hammock Koch, and Jeremy Hansen speak to members of the media outside the West Wing of the White House in Washington, Thursday, Dec. 14, 2023, after meeting with President Joe Biden. Credit: AP Photo/Andrew Harnik

An international astronaut will join U.S. astronauts on the moon by

decade's end under an agreement announced Wednesday by NASA and the White House.

The news came as Vice President Kamala Harris convened a meeting in Washington of the National Space Council, the third such gathering under the Biden administration.

There was no mention of who the international moonwalker might be or even what country would be represented. A NASA spokeswoman later said that crews would be assigned closer to the lunar-landing missions, and that no commitments had yet been made to another country.

NASA has included international astronauts on trips to space for decades. Canadian Jeremy Hansen will fly around the moon a year or so from now with three U.S. astronauts.

Another crew would actually land; it would be the first lunar touchdown by astronauts in more than a half-century. That's not likely to occur before 2027, according to the [U.S. Government Accountability Office](#).

All 12 moonwalkers during NASA's Apollo program of the 1960s and 1970s were U.S. citizens. The space agency's new moon exploration program is named Artemis after Apollo's mythological twin sister.

Including international partners "is not only sincerely appreciated, but it is urgently needed in the world today," Hansen told the council.

NASA has long stressed the need for global cooperation in space, establishing the Artemis Accords along with the U.S. State Department in 2020 to promote responsible behavior not just at the moon but everywhere in space. Representatives from all 33 countries that have signed the accords so far were expected at the space council's meeting in Washington.

"We know from experience that collaboration on space delivers," said Secretary of State Antony Blinken, citing the Webb Space Telescope, a U.S., European and Canadian effort.

Notably missing from the Artemis Accords: Russia and China, the only countries besides the U.S. to launch their own citizens into orbit. Russia is a partner with NASA in the International Space Station, along with Europe, Japan and Canada. Even earlier in the 1990s, the Russian and U.S. space agencies teamed up during the shuttle program to launch each other's astronauts to Russia's former orbiting Mir station.

During Wednesday's meeting, Harris also announced new policies to ensure the safe use of space as more and more private companies and countries aim skyward. Among the issues that the U.S. is looking to resolve: the climate crisis and the growing amount of space junk around Earth. A 2021 anti-satellite missile test by Russia added more than 1,500 pieces of potentially dangerous orbiting debris, and Blinken joined others at the meeting in calling for all nations to end such destructive testing.

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