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GEO Bulletin

A Daily Report of the Tenth Plenary Session of the Group on Earth Observations (GEO-X) and Geneva Ministerial Summit
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TENTH PLENARY SESSION OF THE GROUP ON EARTH OBSERVATIONS (GEO-X) AND GENEVA MINISTERIAL SUMMIT 15-17 JANUARY 2014

The Tenth Plenary Session of the Group on Earth Observations (GEO-X) will convene from 15-16 January 2014 in Geneva, Switzerland, followed by a high-level panel on the afternoon of Thursday, 16 January, and the third GEO Ministerial Summit on Friday, 17 January. The GEO Week started on 12 January prior to the official GEO meetings, and includes side events, working meetings and a Ministerial Summit Exhibition. The GEO Executive Committee (ExCom) held its meeting on 14 January. The Plenary and high-level discussions are expected to guide the Ministerial Summit, tasked with deliberating on a renewed mandate for GEO through 2025 and the adoption of a Geneva Declaration containing high-level recommendations to guide the development of a detailed 2015-2025 Implementation Plan for the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS).

GEO is a voluntary partnership consisting of Members and Participating Organizations that are coordinating efforts to build the GEOSS. The European Commission and any UN member state that formally endorses the GEOSS 10-Year Implementation Plan can be a GEO Member. Participating Organizations are intergovernmental, international and regional organizations with a mandate in Earth observations or related activities who have formally endorsed the GEOSS 10-Year Implementation Plan and been approved by GEO Members meeting in Plenary. Currently, GEO consists of 89 Member countries and the European Commission and 67 Participating Organizations. The current Implementation Plan was endorsed by ministers in 2005.

The annual Plenary is GEO's primary decision-making body, while the ExCom guides GEO between Plenary sessions. The other GEO governance components are the Implementation Boards and working groups of the Plenary, and a Secretariat, based in Geneva, Switzerland. Implementation Boards have been established in the areas of infrastructure implementation, institutions and development, and social benefits. Currently, working groups support GEO in monitoring and evaluation, data sharing, and post-2015 GEOSS implementation.

As a "system of systems," GEOSS seeks to link existing and planned observing systems around the world, and support the development of new systems where gaps currently exist, with a

view to providing key data to assist decision makers, planners and emergency managers in nine "Societal Benefit Areas": disasters, health, energy, climate, water, weather, ecosystems, agriculture and biodiversity. Work in many of these Societal Benefit Areas are guided by "Communities of Practice" (CoPs) voluntarily formed by stakeholders, from providers to the final beneficiaries of Earth observation data and information, with a common interest in specific aspects of societal benefits to be realized by GEOSS implementation. Current CoPs include those on air quality, atmospheric chemistry, biodiversity, carbon, coastal zones, cryosphere, energy, forests, geohazards, global agricultural monitoring, health and the environment, and the water cycle.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE GEO

WORLD SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (WSSD): Held from 26 August to 4 September 2002 in Johannesburg, South Africa, the WSSD highlighted the need for coordinated observations relating to the state of the Earth.

FIRST EARTH OBSERVATION SUMMIT (EOS-I): High-level representatives of 34 governments meeting on 31 July 2003 in Washington, DC, US, adopted a declaration establishing the *ad hoc* intergovernmental Group on Earth Observations (*ad hoc* GEO), co-chaired by the European Commission, Japan, South Africa and the US, to draft a 10-Year Implementation Plan.

SECOND EARTH OBSERVATION SUMMIT (EOS-II): Convened on 24 April 2004 in Tokyo, Japan, this Summit of 40 governments adopted a Framework Document defining the scope and intent of GEOSS.

THIRD EARTH OBSERVATION SUMMIT (EOS-III): This Summit was convened on 16 February 2005 in Brussels, Belgium. In a resolution, delegations from almost 60 countries endorsed the 2005-2015 GEOSS 10-Year Implementation Plan and established the intergovernmental GEO to implement it.

FIRST PLENARY SESSION OF GEO (GEO-I): GEO-I was held from 3-4 May 2005 in Geneva, Switzerland. GEO-I agreed on the structure and duties of the ExCom to guide GEO between plenaries, with 12 members, with three members apiece for Europe, Asia/Oceania and the Americas, two from Africa and one from the Commonwealth of Independent States. The session also agreed to have four co-chairs, two representing

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developed countries and two representing developing countries, who would chair the ExCom and Plenary. GEO-I also endorsed the proposed User Interface Mechanism.

SECOND PLENARY SESSION OF GEO (GEO-II): Held from 14-15 December 2005 in Geneva, Switzerland, GEO-II adopted the GEO Rules of Procedure and approved the GEO Work Plan for 2006.

THIRD PLENARY SESSION OF GEO (GEO-III): GEO-III convened from 28-29 November 2006 in Bonn, Germany. GEO-III accepted the 2007-2009 Work Plan on the basis that it will be updated annually, along with the accompanying Outreach Plan and Capacity Building Strategy. GEO-III also accepted, *inter alia*, the Guidance for Recognition of New GEO Participating Organizations and Observers and the Guidelines for Additional Contributions.

FOURTH PLENARY SESSION OF GEO (GEO-IV)/ FIRST GEO MINISTERIAL SUMMIT: GEO-IV was held from 28-29 November 2007, followed by the Ministerial Summit on 30 November, in Cape Town, South Africa. The Ministerial Summit supported the establishment of a process with the objective of reaching consensus on the implementation of Data Sharing Principles for GEOSS to be presented to the next GEO Ministerial Summit. The Summit also committed to exploring ways and means for the sustained operation of the shared architectural GEOSS components and related information infrastructure, and to work together to improve the interoperability of and access to observation and associated prediction and information systems.

FIFTH PLENARY SESSION OF GEO (GEO-V): GEO-V was held from 19-20 November 2008 in Bucharest, Romania. GEO-V created a Data Sharing Principles Task Force and a Monitoring and Evaluation Working Group, accepted the 2009-2011 Work Plan subject to annual updates, reviewed work on Strategic Targets for GEOSS Implementation by 2015, and asked the ExCom to provide options for the Committee's expansion.

SIXTH PLENARY SESSION OF GEO (GEO-VI): GEO-VI was held from 17-18 November 2009 in Washington, DC, US, and discussed implementation of the Data Sharing Principles and recommendations for long-term operations of common infrastructure. It also approved a revised set of 14 GEOSS Strategic Targets, one apiece for each of the nine Societal Benefits Areas and five regarding architecture, data management, capacity building, science and technology, and user engagement.

SEVENTH PLENARY SESSION OF GEO (GEO-VII)/ SECOND GEO MINISTERIAL SUMMIT: GEO-VII was held from 3-4 November 2010, and the Ministerial on 5 November, in Beijing, China. GEO-VII reviewed a mid-term evaluation of GEOSS implementation, updated the 2009-2011 Work Plan, started work on developing the 2012-2015 Work Plan, and accepted a proposal for a Global Forest Observation Initiative (GFOI) relating to the GEO Forest Carbon Tracking Task.

The Ministerial Summit Declaration endorsed the refined GEO Targets and committed to: maximizing the number of documented datasets made available on the basis of full and

open access; creating the GEOSS Data Collection of Open Resources for Everyone (GEOSS Data-CORE); and developing flexible national and international policy frameworks to ensure a more open data environment. The Declaration also: called on UN bodies, other international organizations, and donor agencies to further contribute to GEOSS implementation and support capacity building for GEOSS users; and encouraged the provision of data and information to all emerging GEOSS initiatives, such as the global carbon observation and analysis system, GFOI, the GEO Biodiversity Observation Network (GEO BON), and a global land cover initiative.

EIGHTH PLENARY SESSION OF GEO (GEO-VIII): GEO-VIII was held from 16-17 November 2011 in Istanbul, Turkey. GEO-VIII examined a second GEOSS implementation report, as well as reports on GEOSS common infrastructure, data sharing, Data-CORE, GEO BON, the African Water Cycle Initiative, the Black Sea Environment Project, Global Drought Monitor, GEO Global Agricultural Monitoring Initiative (GEOGLAM), and an implementation plan for GFOI. GEO-VIII also accepted the GEO 2012-2015 Work Plan.

UN CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (UNCSD or Rio+20): Rio+20 recognized: the importance of space-technology-based data, *in situ* monitoring, and reliable geospatial information for sustainable development policy making, programming and project operations; and efforts towards developing global environmental observing systems, including GEOSS.

NINTH PLENARY SESSION OF GEO (GEO-IX): GEO-IX was held from 22-23 November 2012 in Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil, and reviewed the third GEOSS implementation evaluation report, approved the 2012-2015 Work Plan subject to annual updates, and endorsed transforming the GFOI Task Force into a GFOI Steering Committee.

GEO-IX also began discussions about the future of GEOSS post-2015 based on the interim report of a working group, which recommended: continuing GEO and the implementation of GEOSS through 2025; GEO incubating specific applications and services based on Earth observations, and arranging for them to be adopted, supported and managed by specific governments and organizations; maintaining the current Societal Benefit Area structure while exploring linkages to three sustainable development framework themes: "sustainable economies" (economic development), "resilient society" (social development) and "vibrant planet" (environmental protection); and maintaining the current GEO governance structure. While most Members and Participating Organizations voiced support for continuing GEO and GEOSS implementation to 2025, they diverged on the working group's other recommendations. GEO-IX asked the GEO Secretariat to draft a compelling case for ministers regarding the achievements of GEOSS and the need for continuing GEO and the GEOSS into the future.