



GEO Bulletin

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A Daily Report of the Tenth Plenary Session of the Group on Earth Observations (GEO-X) and Geneva Ministerial Summit
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GEO-X AND GENEVA MINISTERIAL SUMMIT HIGHLIGHTS: WEDNESDAY, 15 JANUARY 2014

The tenth plenary session of the Group on Earth Observations (GEO-X) opened on Wednesday, 15 January 2014, in Geneva, Switzerland. The opening session was addressed by the four GEO Co-Chairs and GEO Secretariat Director Barbara Ryan. The morning sessions then discussed the vision of GEO to 2025, preparations for the next GEOSS Implementation Plan, and the draft Geneva Declaration to be adopted by the Ministerial Summit. The afternoon session focused on GEOSS implementation and highlights.

OPENING SESSION

Welcoming participants to Geneva, Karine Siegwart, Head of Delegation, Switzerland, noted that GEO-X has the highest number of participants and ministers in attendance of any GEO-related meeting.

GEO Co-Chair Kathryn Sullivan (US) suggested that GEO illustrates that open and publicly available data drives innovation in the public and private sectors, saves lives, speeds relief to disasters, and enables leaders to respond more wisely to a changing world. She urged the re-endorsement of GEO's mandate for a second decade. Co-Chair Jianlin Cao (China) highlighted work undertaken in the Asia region, including on natural disasters, such as floods, typhoons and large-scale forest fires. Co-Chair Rudolf Strohmeier (European Commission) underscored the importance of a successful Ministerial Summit towards a renewed mandate for the 2016-2025 period. Co-Chair Philemon Mjwara (South Africa) outlined two tasks for the Plenary: reflecting on the progress and achievements of GEO and GEOSS; and starting the development of a vision for the future of GEO beyond 2015. He reminded participants about the need to restore the high-level political profile GEO had in its early stages.

GEO Secretariat Director Ryan expressed hope that the Ministerial Summit will endorse the next decade of GEO activities, and called on delegates to elaborate on lessons learned from past successes and failures.

The Plenary then adopted the draft agenda (Document 1) without amendments, recognized Georgia as a new Member (Document 2 Rev1), and approved ten new Participating Organizations (POs) and two observers (Document 3 Rev3). The opening session concluded with the adoption of the report of GEO-IX (Document 4).

GEO TO 2025

GENEVA MINISTERIAL SUMMIT DRAFT AGENDA AND CONTENT OF MINISTERIAL FOLDER: Secretariat Director Ryan explained that the documents relevant to the Summit (Document MS1) had been prepared by a Ministerial Working Group, and Working Group Co-Chair José Romero (Switzerland) explained the Group's mandate and process.

VISION FOR GEO 2025: GEO Co-Chair Sullivan invited comments on the draft Vision for GEO 2025 (Document MS2). The UK welcomed the recommendations, encouraged GEO

to build better links with users, and suggested GEO make a stronger economic case for its work to increase financial contributions. SWITZERLAND supported the overall vision and called on GEO to illustrate how the provision of data leads to concrete and measurable outcomes. He welcomed a focus on land cover mapping and suggested merging the work on ecosystems and biodiversity to develop synergies. GERMANY suggested increasing the number of ExCom members. CHINA said the vision demonstrates a strong strategy for GEOSS.

AUSTRALIA suggested building on the contributions of participants to GEO and stressed the need to realize its potential at the user level, in particular in developing countries. The COMMITTEE ON EARTH OBSERVATION SATELLITES recommended that GEO remain focused on its overarching goal of creating the GEOSS. ITALY suggested focusing on achieving a larger commitment from countries and institutions actively participating in GEO. CANADA highlighted exploring modifications to the Societal Benefit Areas (SBAs) system. He also called for a "responsible" ExCom expansion and engagement with POs between Plenary sessions. The EUROPEAN SPACE AGENCY (ESA) stressed the need for a coherent statement on data needs for addressing societal challenges. The WORLD METEOROLOGICAL ORGANIZATION emphasized promotion of open data access. The FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION suggested that iterations of the vision encompass a nexus-based approach to food security.

GEO-X approved the document with an amendment suggested by Australia to add "to apply the associated data" in relation to use of Earth observation data in developing countries, and agreed to forward other comments to the Implementation Plan Working Group (IPWG) expected to be established. Considering the importance of various key questions that had been raised, GEO Co-Chair Sullivan urged participants to nominate "distinguished experts" to the IPWG to assist in engaging with the issues.

GEO PROGRESS REPORT: The Secretariat presented a document on the achievements of GEO (Document MS3) to the Plenary.

MINISTERIAL GUIDANCE ON THE EVOLUTION OF GEOSS: GEO Co-Chair Mjwara presented documents on Guidance on the Evolution of GEOSS (Document MS4) and Preliminary Guidance for GEO 2025 (Document 5) for the Plenary's consultation and information, respectively. Reflecting on the former, he emphasized the need to: restore high-level political support; enhance capacity in developing countries to use available data to inform decision making; and comprehend the breadth of the GEOSS architecture and related resource needs.

The EUROPEAN COMMISSION, supported by many participants, expressed support for the documents' contents. ITALY, supported by GERMANY and AUSTRALIA, underscored the need for stronger political support. He also suggested better-defined GEOSS-related responsibilities for Members and POs. JAPAN suggested better engagement with the post-2015 development agenda. SWITZERLAND,

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supported by the OPEN GEOSPATIAL CONSORTIUM (OGC), FRANCE and the UK, drew attention to the need for GEO to engage the private sector and users. The US underscored the importance of added rigor in the next ten years of work. COLOMBIA and NIGERIA stressed the need for capacity building to enable developing countries to access GEOSS-related data. NORWAY stated that data sharing should be elevated from being a principle to a practice. The ESA, supported by FAO, suggested GEO move beyond collating data and actively evaluate what new data are required.

GEO HIGHLIGHTS FACT SHEET: GEO Co-Chair Sullivan presented a GEO fact sheet (Document MS5) to the Plenary for information and invited delegates to submit their comments to the Secretariat.

PREPARATION OF THE NEXT GEOSS IMPLEMENTATION PLAN: GEO Co-Chair Strohmeier presented a proposal outlining the process towards a new implementation plan (Document 6), including the establishment of an IPWG. He said the cornerstone of the proposal is that the GEO community must be strongly represented and in control of the process. He introduced a proposed modification consisting of increasing the number of distinguished experts to up to three per caucus. He explained the steps of the roadmap are envisioned to include a review of a draft Implementation Plan by GEO-XI, adoption of the Plan by GEO-XII, and subsequent endorsement by ministers.

JAPAN, CHINA, CANADA, AUSTRALIA and the US supported the proposal. CANADA called for clear articulation of the expected outcome, attention to the consultative process, and reflection on the roles and division of responsibilities between the Plenary and ExCom. AUSTRALIA inquired about how other processes, such as possible modifications to the SBAs, might affect the preparatory process. NORWAY requested time to review the new proposal prior to its approval. GEO Co-Chair Sullivan suggested the Plenary return to the sub-item on Thursday morning for approval of the document.

DRAFT GENEVA DECLARATION

Ministerial Working Group Co-Chair Ezio Bussoletti (Italy) introduced the document (Document MS6) and suggested that the subtitle “Integrating Observations to Sustain Our Planet” could include the word “information.” NORWAY, opposed by JAPAN, suggested replacing text referencing “environmental observing systems” with “GEOSS.” ITALY, opposed by FRANCE, the US, CANADA and AUSTRALIA, suggested a drafting group convene to assess the suggestions. The drafting group was not established.

GEOSS IMPLEMENTATION AND HIGHLIGHTS ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS – TARGET AND TASK:

Stuart Marsh, Co-Chair, Institutions and Development Implementation Board, introduced the 2013 Assessment of Progress report (Document 7). He stated that the latest assessment is based on more information than the first, indicates overall improvement, and suggests the tasks would benefit from increased funding. The GLOBAL CLIMATE OBSERVING SYSTEM expressed concern about the fact that the climate target is aspirational and that the recommendations emphasize modeling instead of observations. GERMANY called for monitoring implementation of the report’s recommendations. The US stressed the need for linkages between targets. CANADA suggested that, in addition to the current approach, a quantitative assessment would be useful. In response, Board Co-Chair Marsh said that while the targets are fixed and aspirational, it is important to approach them with pragmatism. The Plenary approved the document.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION: John Adamec, Co-Chair, Monitoring and Evaluation Group (M&E WG), summarized recommendations of the Fourth Evaluation of GEOSS Implementation (Document 8), including: creating new tasks or components; increasing cross-SBA cooperation; strengthening user identification and engagement; and identifying clear performance indicators. Ian Davidson,

ExCom Member, presented the Committee’s response to the recommendations by the M&E WG. The Plenary approved the document without modifications.

Presenting findings of the report on Progress on Implementation of Recommendations from GEOSS Evaluation (Document 9) and an update on current and upcoming evaluations, M&E WG Co-Chair Adamec described satisfactory process in reported responses to recommendations, and noted the ongoing Fifth Evaluation, expected to be ready by May 2014, and the final comprehensive evaluation, to be carried out in 2014-2015.

The EUROPEAN COMMISSION, supported by the ESA and the US, suggested upgrading the status of progress in utilization of current generation technology, given the progress under the GEO Common Infrastructure. Noting the comments, GEO Co-Chair Sullivan suggested approving the document with the proposed modification and called for delegates to support the work of the forthcoming final evaluation. The Plenary approved Document 8 with the suggested change.

GEO 2012-2015 WORK PLAN UPDATE: The Secretariat presented on the 2014 update of the 2012-2015 Work Plan (Document 10). She explained the document incorporates the technical and official comments received from the GEO community during May-November 2013 and draws from the recommendations of the Work Plan Symposium, held in June 2013 in Geneva, Switzerland. She said six new task components have been created: services for the coastal zone; developing capacity and social awareness; land cover for Africa; global wildfire information system; fostering utilization of Earth observation remote sensing data for all phases of disaster risk management; and a global network for observations and information in mountain environments. The document was approved as a “living document” without changes.

GEOSS IMPLEMENTATION HIGHLIGHTS: The Secretariat presented on 2013 contributions from GEO Members and POs to GEOSS implementation, citing examples on, *inter alia*: crop information for decision making; energy tools and services; tracking pollutants; carbon assessment and budgets; forests; biodiversity; global and local urban footprints; disasters information; climate change detection and adaptation; water; cold regions; and building ocean communities. She updated on initiatives to develop capacity to use GEOSS, the expansion of GEONETCast, and efforts to mobilize resources for GEOSS. Participants were shown a film summarizing hydrology-related initiatives.

CHINA underscored the importance of international verification of data sets. The COMMITTEE ON SPACE RESEARCH presented on its work in the context of GEOSS implementation and encouraged the Data Sharing Working Group to address its North-South and gender balances.

Antonello Provenzale, Global Ecosystem Monitoring Task Coordinator, presented on the Global Network for Observation and Information in Mountain Environments (GEO-GNOME). He said GEO-GNOME will collect data, identify key questions, support policy actions and develop capacity-building strategies.

Andiswa Mlisa, AfriGEOSS Working Group, outlined the establishment, objectives, implementation approach and organizational arrangements for the AfriGEOSS initiative (Document 11). She called for strengthening relationships between AfriGEOSS and the international and GEO communities.

Numerous Members and POs expressed support to GEO-GNOME and AfriGEOSS and described their contributions to each.

Guido Colangeli, ESA, presented on the GEOSS Portal (www.geoportal.org) launched in December 2013, noting features, such as “latest news,” YouTube tutorials, and the search and feedback functions.