

HIGH LEVEL FORUM ON GLOBAL GEOSPATIAL INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

SUMMARY OF THE CHAIRPERSON

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The First High Level Forum on Global Geospatial Information Management, held in Seoul from 24 to 26 October 2011, brought together 350 participants from 90 countries, 22 United Nations representatives, and 37 representatives from international organizations and the private sector.

The Forum was opened by Prime Minister Kim Hwang-Sik of the Republic of Korea, United Nations Under-Secretary-General Mr. Sha Zukang, and Prof. Cartwright, President of the Joint Board of Geospatial Information Societies.

The Prime Minister stressed that geospatial information is the most fundamental and essential tool to support our joint efforts in resolving global issues. By interconnecting information on natural disasters, poverty and the environment through location data, global issues such as sustainable development and poverty eradication can be systematically and effectively managed. He pointed out that, as a consequence of rapid technological advances, geospatial data have become increasingly important in our daily lives.

The Forum began with a Ministerial Segment with Ministers from eight countries (Korea, Chile, Finland, India, Malaysia, Mongolia, Namibia, Niger) exchanging views on the role of geospatial information in national development. This is followed by four thematic sessions focusing on “Challenges in Geospatial Policy Formulation and Institutional Arrangement”, “Developing Common Frameworks and Methodologies”, “International Coordination and Cooperation in Meeting Global Needs” and “Capacity Building and Knowledge Transfer”. The Forum was preceded on Sunday 23 October by an Exchange Forum attended by representatives from the geospatial industry and the government.

The main issues that surfaced in the discussion are summarized in the following paragraphs, including concrete proposals for action to be considered by the UN-GGIM Committee:

1. The Ministers voiced strong support for the United Nations initiative of Global Geospatial Information Management and argued for the important role of geospatial information in policy formulation and evidence-based decision making for national development. Several policy challenges were explicitly referenced: climate change, disaster management, population growth

and food security, tourism, urban planning and sustainable development. Ministers pointed out that the demand for geospatial data does not only come from the political level in the context of policy formulation and decision making, but also increasingly from civil society in the context of efficient public service delivery, a process that was described as the “democratization of data”.

2. The Ministers stressed the importance of working together across borders. Whilst the country circumstances might differ, the ministers pointed to the benefits of cooperation, which allowed savings with respect to costly R&D investments, sharing of good practices and technology transfer, in order to meet national, regional and global demand for geospatial data. Collaboration enabled the tapping into a larger infrastructure. This was of particular importance for Member States with less capacity as it provided access to additional capabilities and capacities.

3. Ministers’ views were echoed by the delegates who, in turn, expressed their appreciation that the issue of geospatial management was given attention at the highest political level. This was considered an important precondition to successfully tackle the institutional and policy challenges related to geospatial information management. The need for a long term vision of development of a geospatial infrastructure, supported by the necessary investments, was stressed. The Forum recognized UN-GGIM as an important platform to advocate for such long term investment.

4. The Forum stressed the importance of collaboration among Member States in developing common frameworks, tools and procedures. This will assist countries to develop integrated national data infrastructures to facilitate collection, integration, sharing and dissemination of information. The Forum pointed out the need to share best practices on impact and usefulness of well implemented national spatial data infrastructures.

5. International geospatial information societies at the Forum affirmed their commitment, and together with the academia, pledged to use their collective professional expertise, research and development capacities to help realize the vision and goal of UN-GGIM of building sustainable geospatial information infrastructure at national, regional, and global levels and of enhanced cooperation in the generation, dissemination and sharing of geospatial information.

6. The Forum recognized the important role of international geospatial information societies and standards setting organizations and welcomed their contributions. Countries voiced their support and desire to fully collaborate with these societies and organizations. In this context, UN-GGIM could play an important role to act as a coordinating body providing overall guidance and direction.

7. The Forum recognized that the geospatial industry is a key partner in global geospatial information community. The dialogue with industry partners noted the importance of continuing the dialogue between governments and industry under the umbrella of UN-GGIM. The private sector could respond faster to the market place and identify appropriate technological solutions, as we moved from a paradigm of management of geospatial information to the management of all kinds of information geospatially.

8. At the national level, the Forum identified the accessibility and sharing of geospatial data at minimum cost as one of the key information policy issues. Open data (and metadata) platforms were considered an important condition for effective integration of geospatial data with other thematic data. Whilst privacy and national security considerations needed to be taken seriously, there was broad support that restrictions on the release of geospatial data should be minimal. The Forum recognized the importance of monitoring the development of crowd sourcing and volunteered geographic information, which could be additional sources of geospatial information.

9. The Forum noted that, with respect to institutional arrangements and legal frameworks, the challenge would be to bring together all producers of geospatial information in an effective manner. Whilst it was recognized that there would not be one solution that fits all countries, the need for integration and coordination under the leadership of a national authoritative body was strongly supported. The Forum suggested UN-GGIM to develop and elaborate some guidelines for countries, describing existing models of institutional arrangements and their strengths and shortcomings. This will also help Member States in their ongoing efforts to modernize their legal frameworks.

10. The Forum pointed out the urgent need to develop a roadmap based on international best practices to assist countries in the development of a National Spatial Data Infrastructure which would form the basis for integrating data with other sources and for data-sharing at all levels (local, national, regional and global).

11. The Forum acknowledged that common frameworks and methodologies are useful to increase accessibility and sharing of data and welcomed the suggestions put forward on global geodetic reference system and a global consultation mechanism on the adoption of technical standards. The UN-GGIM was asked to further explore the need for common framework through appropriate work groups.

12. The Forum expressed the need to develop effective strategies for building and strengthening capacity of Member States, especially developing countries, to manage geospatial information. A holistic capacity building effort was recommended, that includes capacity assessment and capacity enhancement in all dimensions: building of knowledge and institutions, education research and outreach. In this context, the Forum recognized the need of appropriate funding mechanism, especially in developing countries, as they try to implement their National Spatial Data Infrastructure in a most timely and efficient way. The Forum suggested that UN-GGIM mechanism could play an important role in enhancing closer cooperation with international funding/aid agencies.

13. The Forum noted the importance of effective regional cooperation and urged greater efforts be made in this regard. Strong regional activities coordinated through regional GGIM mechanisms would in turn help build an effective global data infrastructure.

14. The Forum adopted the Seoul Declaration at the conclusion of the Forum.