

**THIRD HIGH LEVEL FORUM ON
UNITED NATIONS GLOBAL GEOSPATIAL INFORMATION MANAGEMENT**

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT WITH GEOSPATIAL INFORMATION

SUMMARY OF THE CHAIRPERSON

Friday, 24 October 2014

**Dr. Li Pengde
Deputy Director General,
National Administration of Surveying, Mapping and Geoinformation (NASG)
People's Republic of China**

The Third High Level Forum on United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management, held in Beijing from 22 to 24 October 2014, brought together 261 participants from 44 countries, 9 United Nations representatives, and 27 representatives from international organizations and the private sector.

The Forum was opened by H.E. Kurexi Maihesuti, Vice Minister of Ministry of Land and Resources of China; Mr. Wu Hongbo, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs; Dr. Eduardo Sojo, Co-Chair, UN Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management; and Mr. Mark Cygan, of the Joint Board of Geospatial Information Societies.

H.E. Vice Minister Kurexi Maihestu remarked that countries share a common fate, as sustainable development has emerged as a global issue for all of us. He assured the commitment by the Government of China of the importance of developing geospatial information, satellite technology and providing guidelines to their national geospatial industry development. Vice Minister Kurexi noted the planning of China's first National Geographical Condition Census, and the donation of the 30 metre Global Land Cover Datasets (GlobeLand30) to the United Nations at the Climate Summit during the 69th session of the UN General Assembly, and its active contribution of activities through the UN-GGIM Trust Fund.

Under-Secretary-General Wu Hongbo in turn, commented that the Forum is timely, as Member States and the United Nations system are charting a path forward towards a post-2015 development agenda, including determining new Sustainable Development Goals, where the opportunity lies to pay particular attention to the critical roles geospatial science, technology and innovation can be used as tools to integrate the 3 pillars – economic, social and environmental – of sustainable development.

Mr. Eduardo Sojo, Co-Chair of the Committee of Experts responded to the expectation of Vice Minister Kurexi and Under-Secretary-General Wu, by acknowledging the power of ideas and how they can change the world. He assured them that the geospatial community has been very active in the 4 years of existence by organizing four Committee of Experts meetings, three High Level Forums and regional meetings under the auspices of the UN-GGIM. He reminded

participants that it is the geospatial community's responsibility to ensure that, by 2016, we demonstrate to the Economic and Social Council the ambitious goals of the Committee and the community. This includes establishing a resolution under the auspices of the United Nations General Assembly on the Global Geodetic Reference Frame (GGRF). Other activities within the UN-GGIM are the issues of shared principles, the importance of standards, and institutional arrangements. Mr. Sojo concluded by reminding us that "all things exist in space and time". The Opening Ceremony concluded with the official opening of the refurbished Chinese Surveying and Mapping Museum, and an exhibition where 28 national private sectors exhibited the latest Chinese geospatial technology capabilities.

The Forum began with a Ministerial Segment with Ministers from 5 countries (The Bahamas, China, Fiji, Islamic Republic of Iran, and Zimbabwe) sharing their views on the role of geospatial information to support local, regional and global sustainable development initiatives. This was followed by five thematic sessions focusing on "Geospatial Information for the Post-2015 Development Agenda", "Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements", "Climate Change and Disaster Mitigation", "Science, Technology, and Innovation to Measure and Monitor Progress", and "Working Together Across Borders and Regions".

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

1. The Ministers commended the efforts of the United Nations for promoting a global understanding on geospatial information and emphasized the importance of the UN-GGIM as a mechanism to harness the professional global leadership and power of geospatial information to assist achieving sustainable development initiatives.
2. The Ministers indicated that there is a growing understanding of the social and economic benefits of geospatial information, as governments who do not embrace and leverage Information Communications Technologies (ICT) will lose out their development and mission delivery opportunities. The Ministers emphasized the need of coordination across ministries and agencies to ensure quality and standardized geospatial information, but also the importance of setting global benchmarks so that each country could aspire to and monitor and measure its progress against common global sustainable goals.
3. Several common challenges were also explicitly referenced, including: sustainable urban planning and land administration and management, the availability of standards, leveraging the relevant scientific and technical information and technology for measuring and monitoring, and awareness that land and water related geospatial information required to be considered cohesively. The Ministers stressed the importance of working together across borders and sharing experiences and advancements in geospatial information management. They affirmed that platforms such as this Forum provided an effective and immediate opportunity to be exposed to contemporary issues and challenges being faced by countries, along with examples of best practices and solutions, and the insights of the private sector's technological capabilities, advances and solutions.

4. Ministers' views were echoed by the delegates who, in turn, expressed their appreciation that geospatial information management was now being given greater attention at the highest political level. However, the Forum also recognized the challenge that policy and decision makers are still learning what geography means and can do to enhance the capability of governments to analyse, monitor and report on sustainable development and other global concerns, whilst scientists and practitioners understand the ability to measure and monitor change and progress over time based on human and physical geography data and geospatial information. In this regard, the "means of implementation" of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals calls for consistent measuring and monitoring mechanisms for better evidence-based decision-making and policy formulation. The importance of demonstrating the critical and integrative role that geospatial information is able to play in order to "increase significantly the availability of high-quality and timely data" was stressed.
5. The Forum noted the reality that no country has yet achieved a complete sustainable development phase to-date. Given this sobering reality, the delegates pledged to consider the need for geospatial indicators to better monitor and measure, the importance of integrating land and water related information, and the ongoing need to communicate effectively with decision-makers that geospatial information is indispensable. The delegates also recognised the urgency of translating geospatial information into targets and indicators under a monitoring framework, where data needs are recognised as an integral part of the agenda. Furthermore, the Forum recognised the reality that if the geospatial community was not able to provide the appropriate information in a timely manner, decision-makers will look for other sources, and hence, the urgency of messaging across the geospatial community that we are at the crossroad of opportunity or missed opportunity or "now or never".
6. The Forum discussed the role of geospatial information in making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe and sustainable, as unprecedented rates of urbanization continues to overwhelm urban and land management administration systems, especially in the developing world. The delegates acknowledged that land management issues are complex, and it requires understanding the key elements to unlocking the issues surrounding land, policy, strategy, technology, trade-off and sustainability, whether from a geospatial perspective or not. There is also an increasing appreciation that the urban challenge is no longer seen as just a rural – urban migration problem, but seen in a more holistic approach, where they consider the rural – urban linkages in addressing solutions, and not separately from each other.
7. There was general recognition that land is a central anchor point to issues surrounding land, and whilst geospatial information can be effective in managing the cadastral information, it is not the end of the means but the beginning of the means. Due to the rapid pace of urbanisation, new approaches need to be considered where there is a paradigm shift from regularisation of land title and ownership to implementing land tools that consider "fit for purpose" and "social tenure domain model" based on geospatial information. In doing so, it again, acknowledged the importance of land management partnerships and collaboration in securing legal property ownership..

8. The role of the scientific community and the private sector in strengthening national geospatial information infrastructure was discussed. It was agreed that both the scientific community and private sector should play a critical role in forecasting better, and providing relevant technological solutions to provide policy and decision-makers with better geospatial methodologies and tools to understand better the inter-relationship of risk, hazard, exposure, vulnerability, affected communities and infrastructure. In this context, the importance of having a global geodetic reference framework was articulated as a means to have a common operating picture in sharing platforms and standards when operating in an emergency situation.
9. Another element was the importance of maximising the value and usability, making geospatial information as an indispensable toolkit, as decision-makers understand the importance to act when the issues were cost factored, and when shown the reality that the frequency of disasters are increasing. In recognising this, the geospatial information value proposition increases dramatically. The delegates also acknowledged that the concept of “fit for purpose” could also apply in the disaster domain, as crowd sourced data and social media could serve the purpose in an emergency environment. New ways of capturing dynamic data include applying a multi-sensory approach with consistent monitoring methodologies in place.
10. The Forum recognised how technology and the data revolution are providing both opportunities and challenges for the geospatial information community on how to leverage the latest available technology and information. There is an increased awareness of the use of volunteered geospatial information (VGI) and crowd sourced information to leverage “evidence-based decision-making”. There is a growing recognition for the need to harmonise these citizen based information with national authoritative information. The geospatial experts also agreed on the importance of balancing issues of standards, privacy and capacity building between both open source and proprietary in context and content.
11. The national geospatial information authorities noted that the onus was on them in realising the success of positing geospatial information as the core base for evidence-based decision-making. They acknowledged that they can now leverage the global framework and mechanisms which are being established under the auspices of the UN-GGIM. The participants recognised that this mechanism should allow Member States to achieve easier regional, inter-regional and global collaboration, to address and solve the common global challenges of sustainable urban planning and land management issues, mitigating climate change and disaster risk by leveraging science, technology and innovation.
12. The Forum adopted the Beijing Declaration at the conclusion of the Forum.