

Summary Report
14th Executive Committee Meeting
Bucharest, 18 November 2008
(As accepted at the 15th Executive Committee)

1 GENERAL BUSINESS

The GEO Co-Chair from South Africa served as Chair of the meeting. He welcomed Mr. Mark Myers, the Director of the US Geological Survey, who was serving as US Co-Chair for the Executive Committee meeting and the GEO-V Plenary meeting.

The representative of the Co-Chair from China congratulated the GEO community for advancing GEOSS from its start-up phase to its implementation phase.

The Co-Chair from the European Commission (EC) emphasized the need to increase the registration of GEOSS components and services and to encourage more GEO members to contribute to the Trust Fund. He also highlighted the importance of reconciling the new 2009-2011 Work Plan with the updated 10-Year Targets, the work on developing performance indicators and the work on improving the overall management and reporting methodology used within GEO. He also referred to the need to launch early work on preparing the 2010 Ministerial Summit.

The US Co-Chair confirmed that the strong commitment of the US to the GEO process would continue through and beyond the current political transition.

All of the Co-Chairs and the Secretariat Director thanked the Romanian Space Agency (ROSA) for hosting GEO-V.

1.1 Adoption of the Agenda (Document 1)

The Chair presented the draft agenda to the Committee for adoption.

The Co-Chair from the EC noted that at its previous meeting the Committee had asked the C4 to examine the process for guiding the work plan and report back; he proposed including a paper submitted by C4 Co-Chairs on this topic as a sub-item under Agenda Item 4 (Planning and Coordination Activities). He also proposed an initial discussion on the planning process for the 2010 Ministerial under item 9 (Any other business). The agenda was adopted with these amendments.

1.2 Approval of Summary Report of the 13th Executive Committee Meeting (Document 2)

The Chair introduced the draft report of the 13th meeting of the Executive Committee.

The representative from Germany cited some comments he had sent earlier to the Secretariat concerning an extended debate over the effectiveness of the GEO committees which had not been reflected in the revised draft report, but he said that there was no need at this point to include them.

The Secretariat Director explained that the comments concerning the role of Committees had been reflected in the introduction to the latest version of the 2009-2011 Work Plan. The US Co-Chair said that he had several recommendations that could be taken up directly with the Secretariat. The Chair suggested that any missing elements from the discussion about the role of Committees could be

reflected in the minutes of the current Committee meeting, and with this understanding the Committee adopted the report without changes.

1.3 Review of Actions from Previous Meetings (Document 3)

At the request of the Chair, the Secretariat Director guided the meeting through the actions that remain open from previous meeting. Germany suggested that in the future this document should reference the relevant document numbers next to each open action.

2 SECRETARIAT OPERATIONS REPORT (DOCUMENT 4 (REV.1.1))

The Secretariat Director introduced the document. He highlighted the emerging focus on Africa and recent work on upgrading the databases that the Secretariat uses to communicate with Members and track Tasks and other activities.

The EC Co-Chair thanked the Secretariat for its extensive report and noted the impressive list of activities. He suggested that the GEO community would more fully appreciate the benefits they are deriving from their contributions to the Trust Fund if the Secretariat made a stronger effort to demonstrate and communicate its achievements. He proposed, for example, that the Secretariat consider publishing a short, regular information bulletin that could be emailed to the community and posted on the GEO web site. By communicating key GEO messages and activities this informal bulletin could contribute to the flow of information and make the Secretariat's work and value more visible. Germany and the Russian Federation also supported the idea of a bulletin.

The US highlighted the recent IUCN World Conservation Congress in Barcelona and noted that the Secretariat and other members of the GEO community were present there to actively promote GEO. This kind of effort, he said, should be encouraged. Japan cited the progress being made by the African Water Cycle Initiative.

Germany said he was satisfied with the report. He thanked the providers of seconded experts, observed that a Secretariat staff of around 20 seemed to be the right size, and expressed the hope that the funding needed for Secretariat activities would be forthcoming. He noted that a final response from the German Aerospace Center (DLR) regarding its contribution to GEO's work on disasters should be received shortly.

Norway suggested that future reports should, where feasible, try to link outcomes and outputs to the activities being described. The Committee then accepted the operations report.

14.1 – Secretariat to strengthen the flow of information within the GEO community by launching an electronic bulletin for the GEO community.

3 SECRETARIAT PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (DOCUMENT 5)

The Secretariat Director introduced the document on proposed Guidelines for Reporting on the Performance of the GEO Secretariat and Secretariat Director.

The Chair, the EC Co-Chair, Australia and Germany agreed on the need to develop performance indicators and were willing to endorse the document. Germany suggested that the indicators could be used on a trial basis. The US agreed and said that the indicators will promote transparency.

The Chair remarked that the text on the interface between the Secretariat and the Committees focuses on logistics and underplays the Secretariat's expertise and ability to contribute substantively to GEOSS implementation.

The Committee adopted the document with minor editorial changes. It agreed that the Guidelines would be reviewed in three years and could be amended then if necessary.

Action 14.2 – Secretariat to finalize document on Secretariat Performance Indicators.

(Action to be reviewed in the medium- to long-term: the Executive Committee should review the Secretariat Performance Indicators in early 2012. See also agenda item 1.3.)

4 PLANNING AND COORDINATION ACTIVITIES (DOCUMENT 6)

The Secretariat Director presented the proposed 2009 schedule for GEO. The schedule contains two sets of Committee meetings per year rather than the traditional three. It also presents the option for each Committee to hold a third meeting should it so choose at the time of the annual Plenary. The meetings are to take place in April/May and in September, with the Plenary and optional third meetings in November. The September Committee meetings should be co-located to the extent possible.

The EC Co-Chair believed that this improved schedule would allow the Executive Committee to provide better guidance. He cited the positive experience in the past of co-locating meetings and stressed the importance of good coordination amongst the processes for updating the work plan, revising the targets and developing performance indicators.

The Executive Committee then accepted the document, agreed that it should be presented to the GEO-V Plenary, and recommended that the September Committee meetings be co-located.

Germany then made an oral presentation of a debate amongst C4 Co-Chairs on GEOSS planning and coordination. He noted that, with the start-up phase of GEOSS concluding, it is important to have a management structure for aligning the targets and tasks. He stressed that the C4 must increase its role as GEO moves towards the phase of actually constructing GEOSS. To be accepted, new Tasks should have identified their leads and their required resources. Communication between the Executive Committee and the Committees should be improved. Each Committee should be represented at meetings of the Executive Committee.

The meeting participants discussed the C4 presentation extensively and recognized that it raised important strategic issues. Regarding the proposal on strengthening the links between the Executive Committee and the Committees, Argentina noted that, according to the Rules of Procedure, Executive Committee members are elected; consequently, it is more appropriate to encourage these elected members to join Committees as co-chairs. The Russian Federation supported this approach.

The Secretariat Director confirmed that when the Plenary nominates and approves Committee Co-Chairs, it always ensures that at least one of them is a member of the Executive Committee. Noting that GEO is a voluntary process, he suggested that it may not be appropriate to impose additional management controls on Task leads, who accept GEO's role as a coordinator, but not necessarily as a top-down manager. The Chair noted that this issue of management vs. coordination will require continued discussions.

Germany proposed asking the C4 to develop more specific proposals on Task management. He mentioned that Japan has also drafted an informal document, which sets out a "GEOSS road map" for building the system of systems, and that this might be a useful contribution to the debate.

The US Co-Chair agreed that it had been a useful discussion and that more clarity was needed about the next steps for guiding GEOSS implementation. At issue was the basic philosophy of what is GEO, the kinds of overarching data sets that GEOSS must provide, how the various Tasks link together or perhaps overlap, and how to manage the process over the longer term.

The Chair concluded that the C4 recommendations usefully addressed some of the challenges facing GEO. He suggested that the GEOSS Roadmap, together with the performance monitoring and

evaluation framework and the new updated Targets, could support future revisions of the 2009-2011 Work Plan that would be tabled at GEO-V. He further proposed that both the C4 and the Committees hold wider consultations and submit their recommendations to the next meeting of the Executive Committee. The meeting agreed on this way forward.

Action 14.3 – C4 to refine its recommendations based on wider consultations by Committees and to submit these to the next meeting of the Executive Committee.

5 REVIEW OF ORGANIZATIONS REQUESTING RECOGNITION AS PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS (DOCUMENT 7(REV. 1))

The Executive Committee reviewed the applications that have been received over the past year by organizations requesting to become GEO Participating Organizations. The eight applicants were the Consortium of Universities for the Advancement of Hydrological Sciences (CUAHSI), Delivery of Advanced Network Technology to Europe (DANTE), the European Centre for Training and Research in Earthquake Engineering (EUCENTRE), Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment (GLOBE), Information Technology for Humanitarian Assistance, Cooperation and Action (ITHACA), the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA).

Germany said that eligible organizations must be international and not already part of an existing Participating Organization. Norway stressed the importance of determining what contribution each applicant would make to GEOSS; he noted that national organizations should engage with GEO through their governments. Australia agreed with Norway's remarks.

China stated that GEO is primarily an intergovernmental organization and that many countries have national GEOs. National organizations should therefore be encouraged to engage with GEOSS through their governments and/or national GEOs. Those countries that have not yet organized a national GEO for coordinating national activities should be encouraged to do so; this would enable national organizations to engage with GEOSS in the proper way.

The US Co-Chair said that there are innumerable organizations, often small and local, working in the domain of in-situ data. The criteria for such organizations may require further consideration. The Secretariat Director agreed that this issue has yet to be addressed.

The Chair noted that a more rigorous template and methodology for evaluating applicants may be needed. For example, is there a mandate for writing back to an applicant when necessary requesting additional information? Germany reminded the group that the option of observer status may be appropriate in some cases. Other participants agreed on the need for greater clarity about the process in the future.

The Committee decided to recommend to the GEO-V Plenary that it accept the applications of DANTE, GLOBE, ICIMOD, IIASA and UNECA. It determined that EUCENTRE and ITHACA did not satisfy the criteria of being international organizations, and it tasked the Secretariat with seeking additional information regarding the international dimension of CUAHSI. In addition, noting the continuing interest of organizations in joining GEO, the Committee decided to ask the Plenary for a mandate to revisit the issue of the recognition of Participating Organizations and to elaborate the expectations that GEO has of Participating Organizations.

6 SECRETARIAT OPERATIONS BUDGET (GEO-V DOCUMENT 17 (REV 1) AND GEO-V DOCUMENT 18 (REV 1))

The Committee decided to consider all three sub-items (the 2008 report, the 2009 budget and the report of the informal finance review) together. The ensuing debate focused on how best to ensure the Secretariat's short-term cash flows and the Trust Fund's long-term sustainability.

The Secretariat Director introduced the two documents. Australia then presented an oral report on the previous day's informal finance review, which had been attended by Australia, Switzerland, WMO and the GEO Secretariat. Australia noted that the Secretariat's immediate financial situation seemed stable, but that an additional 2.3 million Swiss francs would be needed to reach the proposed budget level. In addition, GEO's working capital must never be lower than 2 million Swiss francs.

The review had identified a series of options for improving GEO's finances, including competitive bidding to decide which meetings would get financial support, optimizing the meeting schedule to take advantage of synergies with other meetings, using travel funds more efficiently, reducing the reliance on contractors by ensuring the right mix of seconded experts, motivating financial contributions by raising the profile of contributions however small, using publicity materials and Co-Chair letters to Principals, conducting case studies to demonstrate the real benefits of GEOSS, and so forth. In conclusion, the long-term viability of GEO is at risk unless cash contributions increase to at least 4.5 million Swiss francs per year.

The Chair noted that implementing these various options for cutting costs and raising funds can involve a time lag between their initiation and their results. The US pointed to the current global economic meltdown and said that both improved fund raising and budget cutting (through improved efficiencies and planning) would be necessary. She added that, while cash contributions seem to be a problem, the US and other countries appear able to provide in-kind support. The EC Co-Chair agreed, saying that there is no "magic bullet" for solving the problem. He stated that the EC contribution for 2009 would remain at 600,000 Euro. And in order to provide continuity of funding, whereby the GEO community needs to look towards developing a continuous funding process, the EC Co-Chair reported that the Commission is working on maintaining this contribution beyond 2009, subject to internal procedures. Australia noted the need to ensure that pledged funds are transmitted earlier in each financial year. Japan expressed its concerns about the situation and pledged to maintain both its financial and in-kind contributions and to supplement them by providing a second expert; he also expressed concerns about relying on private-sector funds.

The Secretariat Director thanked Australia for its report. He noted that reducing spending too much would risk failing to meet the expectations of GEO members. He returned to the issue of whether there might be opportunities for seeking funds from outside the membership by demonstrating the added value of GEOSS to private industry or foundations, for example, but recognized the difficulties involved.

Australia suggested that the next Executive Committee meeting address the issue of funding. Regarding funds from the private sector and foundations, she urged extreme caution. The EC Co-Chair suggested that the Committee should request a more detailed paper on the process that could be revised and presented to GEO-VI for a decision. The US Co-Chair highlighted the distinction between short-term cash flow and long-term sustainability and expressed optimism about GEO's ability to raise funds over the longer term while finding cost savings over the shorter term. Japan noted that the Secretariat should explore possible contributions from GEO members, especially G8 countries and Executive Committee members.

The Chair summarized the debate and recognized the many useful ideas that had been presented. He proposed asking Australia, supported by the Secretariat, to explore the various ideas raised during the discussion and to present a paper at the Committee's next meeting. The Committee agreed.

Action 14.4 – Australia and Secretariat to draft paper on strengthening the GEO Trust Fund for next meeting of the Executive Committee.

7 REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE TO GEO-V (DOCUMENT 8)

The Secretariat Director presented the document, which contained summaries of the Committee's 12th and 13th meetings as drafted by the Secretariat. He explained that it would be finalized in "real time" to include the summary of the current, 14th, meeting. At the end of the day the Committee reviewed the completed document and, with a number of corrections, adopted it. It agreed that the South African Co-Chair, in his capacity as chair of the current meeting, would present the report to Plenary as GEO-V Document 14.

8 REVIEW OF GEO-V AGENDA AND DOCUMENTS

The Committee reviewed the GEO-V agenda and documents and finalized the scenario for the Plenary meeting. It discussed the opening of the GEO-V Exhibition and revisited the issue of how to handle the presentation of applications from organizations eager to join GEO. Following a debate over transparency, the role of the Plenary vs the Executive Committee, and related issues, the Committee agreed to include the list of applicants in the presentation to Plenary. It was also noted that the Plenary needed to fully engage on the issue of the Trust Fund's declining level of resources, the low level of registrations in the GCI, and the need to proactively push GEO forward.

Mr. Marius Piso, President of the Romanian Space Agency (ROSA) and host of GEO-V and its related meetings, then addressed the Committee. On behalf of all present, the Chair thanked Romania for all of its efforts to ensure a successful conference.

The meeting also discussed the scenario for the GEO BON implementation plan document, the report of the Target Task Team (T3), the GEOSS Monitoring & Evaluation Framework, the 2009-2011 Work Plan, and other key documents. It reviewed the decisions on Co-Chair nominations that would need to be taken by the regional caucuses. The Chairs of the regional caucuses informed the Executive Committee that the incoming membership would include the EC, France and Norway for Europe; South Africa and Uganda for Africa; Argentina, Belize and the US for the America; and the Russian Federation for the CIS. The Asia/Oceania slate would include Australia and China; Japan would be stepping down and is likely to be replaced by Korea.

Germany informed the Committee of a letter sent to the Secretariat suggesting that it provide more details on the front page of Plenary documents clarifying the action the Plenary is being asked to take (e.g. to note or to accept a document).

Action 14.5 – Secretariat to respond to the letter from Germany.

9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Germany made a presentation on the "C4 Dialogue and Recommendations for 2010 Summit Preparations." Noting the importance of an early start to planning the 2010 GEO Ministerial Summit, the Committee asked the C4 to carry this issue forward until the establishment of the relevant Task Team(s) at the next Executive Committee meeting. It also tasked the Secretariat with preparing a document for the next Executive Committee meeting outlining the planning process and expected priorities for the Summit.

The GEO Co-Chairs thanked Romania for hosting the GEO-V Plenary, the South Africa Co-Chair for guiding the meeting so efficiently through its agenda, and the outgoing Committee members from Germany, Japan and Panama for their contributions.

Action 14.6 – Secretariat to produce a paper for the next Executive Committee meeting developing the recommendations of the C4 and outlining the process for preparing for the 2010 Ministerial Summit.