

Summary Report
20th Executive Committee Meeting
Beijing, 2 November 2010
(As accepted at the 21st Executive Committee meeting)

1 GENERAL BUSINESS

The meeting was chaired by Mr Zheng Guoguang, the GEO Co-Chair from China, in Beijing immediately before the GEO-VII Plenary meeting.

In her opening remarks, Ms Manuela Soares, the GEO Co-Chair from the European Commission, said that, in addition to preparing the Ministerial, GEO must also show that it has learned from its experiences over the first five years of GEOSS implementation and is building upon them to develop the plans required to achieve its vision for GEOSS by 2015.

Mr Philemon Mjwara, the GEO Co-Chair from South Africa, noted that GEO has achieved a great deal and can now claim a functional secretariat staff, stable committees and other bodies, a reasonably healthy Trust Fund, a good alignment between the strategic targets and the Work Plan, progress towards the GEOSS Common Infrastructure, and a range of visible activities.

Ms Sherburne Abbott, the GEO Co-Chair from the United States, also emphasized the important progress that has been made. The Beijing meetings offer a critical opportunity for measuring and demonstrating that progress, and it is important that GEO continues to move issues forward and does not reopen past decisions.

The Chair welcomed the representative from Chile as it was his first time participating in an Executive Committee meeting.

1.1 Adoption of Agenda (Document 1)

The Secretariat Director recommended that item 6 on the Report of the Executive Committee to GEO-VII be moved up and addressed before lunch. With this change the agenda was adopted.

1.2 Approval of Summary Report of the 19th Executive Committee Meeting (Document 2)

The Secretariat Director introduced the document. There were no comments and the document was accepted.

1.3 Review of Actions from previous meetings (Documents 3, 8)

The Secretariat Director introduced the document, which included some 20 open actions. South Africa asked that Action 19.1 on the Eye on Earth Summit be kept open. The European Commission proposed that Action 18.6 also remain open, as the need for stronger support to the GEO Trust Fund remains. The European Commission also proposed a change to Action 13.7 to reflect the need for considering any proposed task within the wider context of the discussions on the 2012-2015 Work Plan, without prejudging the outcome of those discussions; Brazil said that other current efforts to address this action should be recognized and that future actions should be taken without waiting for the new 2012-2015 Work Plan, as recommended by the Secretariat.

Australia discussed how to develop a structural gap analysis and indicated that a draft plan would be presented at the next Executive Committee meeting.

Altogether 16 of the Actions were declared closed.

2 SECRETARIAT OPERATIONS REPORT (DOCUMENT 4)

The Secretariat Director presented the document. Brazil said that the document described an impressive effort by the Secretariat. The United States invited the meeting to give the Secretariat a round of applause.

South Africa noted a potential issue of duplication involving the International Charter on Space and Major Disasters that GEO should resolve.

The Secretariat Director reported on his concerns about the perceived lack of cooperation by the WMO human resources department concerning his delegated authority over staffing issues. The current issue concerns the promotion of a regular (non-seconded) staff member that is being blocked. He requested the support of the Executive Committee in communicating to WMO the need to respect the delegation of authority and to enable GEO to benefit from simplified procedures.

The Committee Co-Chairs and members agreed to use their contacts and channels to communicate this message. They also expressed their support for the requested promotion in view of the progress they could observe in Work Plan reporting. If necessary to address this or other concerns at a later date, the Co-Chairs could write a joint letter. The Executive Committee recognized that the dialogue with WMO should remain, as it is now, positive and constructive.

Italy noted that United Nations bodies can be highly bureaucratic and that the delegation of authority to GEO was essential. He also questioned the long-term benefits of the Secretariat being tied to a UN agency. The Secretariat Director said that in general the relationship with WMO has much improved over time.

Action 20.1 – Committee members to encourage the WMO human resources department to respect the delegation of authority for GEO staffing matters to the Secretariat Director.

3 REVIEW OF SUMMIT DOCUMENTS

3.1 Agenda (Document MS0)

Mr David Grimes, the Co-Chair of the 2010 Ministerial Task Force, described the agenda and scenario for the Ministerial. A number of short videos presenting GEO "showcases" will be screened during the course of the day. The first showcase video, on capacity building, will be shown the evening before at the Ministerial dinner. The Summit itself will open with a short "curtain raiser" video. This will be followed by showcase videos on the Asian region during session 1, health services at the start of session 2, GEO BON at the start of session 3, and carbon monitoring at the start of session 4. In response to a query from Australia, it was confirmed that the showcase videos will be posted in a downloadable format on the GEO web site after the conference.

3.2 Declaration (Document MS1)

China presented the draft Declaration. To date it had received only limited comments on the draft text, including comments from the United States on user engagement. Brazil noted that at the Cape Town Ministerial the issue of the Data Sharing Principles had required the most attention during the

negotiations. The European Commission confirmed that the European caucus had no objections to the current text.

The Chair stated his intention to establish an open-ended working group to discuss the draft Declaration during the Plenary. He requested Mr Grimes and Mr Cai Zhiping of China's Ministry of Science and Technology to facilitate the group's discussions. In response to a comment from Italy, he confirmed that participation in the group will be open to both Members and Participating Organizations.

3.3 Report on Progress (Document MS2)

Mr Grimes presented the document. He applauded the good work of the Secretariat in writing and producing a very useful and readable Report on Progress that demonstrates the great progress GEO has made since the previous such report in 2007. The GEO Co-Chair from South Africa will make a presentation during the Ministerial based on this Report, the Mid-term Evaluation and other inputs.

The Secretariat Director introduced the informal information book "Crafting Geoinformation," which describes the horizontal nature of GEO and provides full credit to the contributors to GEOSS. The book will be distributed to delegates in their conference bags.

4 REVIEW OF GEO-VII AGENDA AND DOCUMENTS

The Executive Committee reviewed the documents for the GEO-VII Plenary meeting. The main outcomes were that it finalized the Report of the Executive Committee to Plenary (Document 18) and the GEOSS Data Sharing Action Plan (Document 7), and it agreed on how to present to Plenary Document 3 on the Recognition of Participating Organizations. It also proposed, with the agreement of Plenary, to prepare a discussion document for GEO-VIII on a long-term strategy for assuring the sustainability of GEOSS beyond 2015; this would then lead to the drafting of a report to be submitted to Ministers in 2013.

During the discussion of the 2011 meetings schedule, the Committee considered the proposals set out by the United States in Executive Committee Document 7 on Executive Committee Procedures. This document recommended limiting meetings of the Executive Committee to two per year, for three days at mid-year and one day just before Plenary, compared to the current three meetings (for a total of five days). The aim would be to reduce travel costs and avoid a bias against countries that cannot afford the travel costs. The US also proposed that the Co-Chair for each meeting take the lead in developing the agenda in consultation with the other Co-Chairs and the Secretariat, and it proposed inviting two United Nations Participating Organizations to each mid-year meeting for consultations.

Brazil did not agree with any of the three proposals. Australia did agree with the US document. South Africa noted that the Committee had moved to three meetings per year because it recognized the need to reflect on the actions mandated by the previous Plenary. Russia and Japan agreed with the proposal concerning UN agencies. Japan noted that the discussions on the post-2015 period should start in 2011. Cameroon suggested that one solution could be to meet immediately after, in addition to before, the Plenary. Cameroon said that the key issue is how the Executive Committee can best play its role in guiding the Secretariat. Brazil noted that as, unlike UN bodies, the Secretariat depended on seconded staff, it was important for the Committee members to be as engaged as possible; he urged the Committee to concentrate on fundamental debates and not only process. South Africa said the issue of special recognition of UN bodies should be considered in the light of an evolving GEO, and he agreed with the need to move on from process issues to look more at implementation.

Based on this discussion, the United States proposed that the issue of how GEO should engage the UN and other organizations in GEO be discussed separately from the issue of the meetings schedule on

another occasion. The US withdrew the document, and the current schedule of meetings was maintained.

Turning to Plenary Document 6 on the Mid-term Evaluation of GEOSS Implementation, the United States referred the meeting to Recommendation 8, which calls on GEO to “establish clear and consistent mechanisms for properly attributing contributions to eliminate the appearance of co-opting activities”. Changes were proposed and accepted to the Executive Committee’s response to Recommendations 1 and 8.

Brazil expressed concern about GEO addressing the issue of IPR. Regarding Recommendation 1 calling on GEO to “develop a long-term strategy to ensure the sustainability of GEOSS beyond 2015,” he expressed concern that the Executive Committee’s management response was not sufficiently clear.

This issue was further discussed in light of the need, as highlighted by the Declaration, for starting to plan for the post-2015 period. After an extended discussion over the process, timing and terms of reference appropriate to this effort, the meeting established an Executive Committee working group. This group will produce a brief paper with a list of deliverables for the next meeting of the Executive Committee. Based on the Committee’s guidance, it will present to the following Executive Committee meeting a more detailed draft options paper for review before it is delivered to GEO-VIII. Brazil agreed to chair the group and Italy and the US expressed their interest in participating. Based on the Plenary’s response a process will be established that will ultimately lead to a report to Ministers in 2013.

Regarding Plenary Document 7 on the GEOSS Data Sharing Action Plan, the European Commission, supported by France and Italy, said that the definition of “minimum costs” given within the definition of “full and open exchange” that was adopted at the GEO-VI Plenary (as part of the Data Sharing Implementation Guidelines) does not fully align with the Data Sharing Principles. The United States expressed concern that such a move would involve revisiting the consensus achieved last year at GEO-VI in Washington and moving backwards on the issue of data sharing. An extended debate ensued over how to accommodate the various concerns expressed. Based on a suggestion from the Secretariat Director, revised text was adopted that is consistent with both the definition of “full and open exchange” that was adopted at the GEO-VI Plenary and the Data Sharing Principles. The document was then finalized for presentation to the Plenary.

The meeting then discussed the Plenary documents on finance and the budget. The EC said that GEO needs to be careful about earmarking funds within the GEO Trust Fund for specific activities, such as the Forest Carbon Tracking Task.

Action 20.2 – The Executive Committee’s Post-2015 Working Group, chaired by Brazil, to prepare a brief paper with list of deliverables for the 21st meeting of the Executive Committee.

5 REVIEW OF ORGANIZATIONS REQUESTING RECOGNITION AS PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS (GEO-VII DOCUMENT 3(REV 2))

The Secretariat Director presented the document together with a recommendation. The Committee accepted the recommendation and asked him to present it to the Plenary.

6 REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE TO GEO-VII (GEO-VII DOCUMENT 18)

The Secretariat Director proposed that, as for previous Plenary meetings, the Secretariat draft a brief summary of the current Executive Committee meeting for approval by the Co-Chairs. This would be appended to the existing document summarizing the previous two meetings and presented to Plenary.

The Chair asked the GEO Co-Chair from the European Commission to make the presentation to Plenary.

Based on the earlier debate on Executive Committee procedures, the meeting agreed to maintain the GEO 2011 master schedule as in 2010; this was appended to the report as Annex 1. The Executive Committee then held a short “in camera” session to conduct its performance assessment of the Secretariat and the Secretariat Director; this was attached to the report as Annex 2.

7 COMMITTEES

Mr Thierry Ranchin of France, Co-chair of the User Interface Committee, presented the report on behalf of the four GEO Committees.

The Secretariat Director proposed that, as in previous years, the Executive Committee recommend the extension of the four Committees and the Monitoring & Evaluation Working Group for the next year. The meeting agreed with this proposal.

8 ANY OTHER BUSINESS (DOCUMENTS 6, 7)

There being no other business, the four GEO Co-Chairs made brief concluding remarks, and the meeting was adjourned.