

Group on Earth Observations (GEO)

REPORT, GEO-III

28-29 November 2006

Bonn, Germany

1 OPENING OF THE SESSION

1.1 Welcome and Opening Remarks

The Third Plenary Meeting of the Group on Earth Observations, GEO-III, opened at 8h45, GEO Co-Chair, Zheng Guoguang chaired the Session.

In welcoming the participants, the GEO Co-Chairs agreed that much progress had been made since the Second Plenary Meeting, even though GEO was still in its early phase.

The United States Co-Chair recalled that GEO had completed its first year of existence during which it moved from an ad-hoc to an operational functional organisation. He asked participants to “be constructive” and work towards a productive session.

All Co-Chairs thanked Germany for hosting GEO-III at such an eminent Conference Centre at such short notice.

1.2 Welcome from the Secretariat

The Secretariat Director welcomed the delegates and recalled that GEO had completed its first year, which had been very productive and successful towards implementing GEOSS. GEO has grown, with 67 Members and 43 Participating Organisations this year. New members would be recognized during the meeting. In thanking Germany for the wonderful setting provided for GEO-III, he recommended that participants visit the exhibition in the foyer and follow the demonstration of GEONETCast.

1.3 Administrative Announcements

Organisational arrangements and administrative announcements were made by the GEO Secretariat Executive Officer.

1.4 Recognition of New Members

Document 3

The Chairman introduced the new GEO Members.

Latvia, Bahrain, Hungary, Paraguay, Uganda and Moldova were welcomed.

Document 3 was acknowledged by the Plenary.

1.5 Statements from New Members

Representatives from Latvia, Moldova and Uganda briefly addressed the Plenary.

Uganda emphasised the importance of joining GEO for its scientists and users community and expressed its thanks for the opportunity to become a member of GEO.

Moldova endorsed the GEO 10-Year Implementation Plan and declared its intention to support the GEOSS implementation.

Latvia expressed thanks for being recognized as a member of GEO and also made reference to its acceptance of the GEO 10-Year Implementation Plan.

1.6 Welcome from Jörg Hennerkes

The State Secretary of the Federal Republic of Germany, Jörg Hennerkes, welcomed GEO on behalf of the Federal Government of Germany. He recalled that numerous United Nations organisations were now based in Bonn, which enabled a closer link of these international activities to GEO, particularly with a view to environmental policies. He also mentioned direct German contributions, such as the Global Run-off Data centre for Hydrology. GEO was seen as a success evidenced by the many members participating and their engagement. The State Secretary stated that Energy and Climate Change were key issues in Germany and recalled the United Nations Climate Change Conference that had taken place in Nairobi, Kenya the week before. Germany considered itself responsible for making GEOSS a success. He further announced that Germany would contribute Euro 100,000 to the GEO budget for the coming year.

1.7 Adoption of the Agenda

Document 1

With the addition of one point (concerning the continuity of Secretariat operations) to the Agenda (after point 1.8), the Agenda (Document 1, v4) was adopted.

1.8 GEO-II Summary

Document 2

The United States Co-Chair presented the summary of the GEO-II Plenary Meeting. He emphasized that the Work Plan had been accepted with 96 tasks along with the budget, the resource provision and the establishment of rules and regulations. In addition, four Committees and one Working Group had been established. GEONETCast was introduced at GEO-II and has made significant progress since then, which would be presented at this Plenary following last year's concept presentations.

The Report of GEO-II (Document 2) was accepted.

1.8b Delegation of Authority to Executive Committee Concerning Secretariat Continuity

The United States Co-Chair introduced the Secretariat operations and noted that the GEO Secretariat was to remain being filled by its Director and staff. He further recommended delegation of authority to the Executive Committee to ensure continuity of Secretariat operations and functioning. This was approved by the Plenary.

1.9 Guidelines for Recognition of Participating Organizations

Document 4

The United States Co-Chair introduced the Draft Guidelines which had been distributed to the Plenary and recommended that the guidelines be annexed to the GEO Rules and Procedures. Comments were made by the United Kingdom, the United States, France and Italy. It was recognized that the process needed to be regulated, and that the number of attendees should remain limited for practical reasons. ICSU and Brazil advocated that maximum flexibility be retained.

Changes to the draft Guidelines were discussed. No consensus was achieved and discussion was postponed to the next day. The Secretariat was requested to prepare a new document.

1.10 Recognition of Participating Organizations

The Secretariat Director presented the list of organisations proposed by the Executive Committee for recognition, and provided the rationale for each recommendation. EUMETSAT proposed that the Coordination Group for Meteorological Satellites (CGMS) be recognized as a Participating Organisation rather than an observer. WMO endorsed EUMETSAT's request.

DIVERSITAS, CGMS and the International Hydrographic Organisation (IHO) were recognized as Participating Organisations.

The Electronic Geophysical Year (eGY), the General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans (GEBCO) and the SysTEM for Analysis, Research and Training (START) were recognized as observers.

2 REPORTS

2.1 General Report on GEOSS Progress 2006

Document 16

The Secretariat Director introduced the Report. He briefly spoke on the progress accomplished in a few areas, emphasizing particularly the preparation of the Capacity Building Strategy by the Capacity Building Committee and the rapid development of the main elements of the GEOSS architecture: the various registries, the Clearinghouse and the Web Portal.

He stated that the stronger involvement of users was still required to fully realise the value of the GEOSS, and provided some examples of progress in several societal benefit areas. On disasters and climate issues, very good links have been established with different organizations and entities (UNOOSA, ISDR, WMO, the Charter, GCOS, WCRP) through the GEO Process. The cooperation with GOOS and POGO on ocean observations and related applications was emphasised in this context. In Ecosystems and Biodiversity, the dialogue initiated with DIVERSITAS, GTOS and GBIF was recognized as very positive. Contact with the OECD in the area of Energy had furthered the identification of user requirements. An initiative between WMO and IGWCO on terrestrial water monitoring networks for health has begun. Finally, he reported of some indications that WHO was considering becoming a Participating Organisation of GEO.

The Secretariat Director emphasized the dramatic progress accomplished in coordinating activities with GCOS on climate and CEOS on the space component of GEOSS. He further referred to ongoing discussions to incorporate the IGOS Partnership themes into GEO. He emphasised the work of the Committees, commending their efforts. It was noted that, in the near future, a stronger focus would be needed on the user community through the User Interface Committee.

EUMETSAT mentioned the progress of GEONETCast, asking the GEO Secretariat to ensure that all the members of the GEO community were made aware of GEONETCast and that all societal benefit areas can profit from this new facility.

The United Kingdom and ICSU noted that the progress reports should not only emphasise areas which are well established. New more critical areas such as Ecosystems and Biodiversity needed to show progress. The added value of GEO for these areas has to be demonstrated.

Brazil, the United Kingdom and France requested explanations on the origin of the tasks in the new Work Plan. In this context, France expressed a desire for a more specific report on the successes of GEO and its added value.

The Russian Federation announced its willingness to increase its participation in the Work Plan.

Canada recalled that 2006 was a year of organisation and said that the process of bringing the community together was well-reflected in the Director's report. Canada concurred that reports for the following year should emphasize the added value of GEO, as well as the progress actually

accomplished by GEO. This progress should be categorised under two headings: networking and concrete outcomes. This was supported by India.

There was general agreement that real value was achieved by getting communities together in networks to achieve common goals. It was suggested that reports would need to be framed around performance indicators. The current list of proposed indicators was generally found to be too long. Germany proposed that indicators should be defined to measure the performance of Members and Participating Organisations in implementing GEOSS, as well as Secretariat activities. Further, applying performance indicators would be very challenging, given the voluntary character of the GEO initiative. A final list would have to be established by the Executive Committee based on inputs from Members and Participating Organisations under the guidance of GEO Plenary.

INCOSE cautioned the Plenary not to miss the real contributions in focussing on performance indicators, since GEOSS was a complex system. Outreach, in this context was important, and it was recognised that it had been done diligently. Further, it was very good to see that data sharing principles were considered a very important component of the GEO process.

Germany emphasized that the 2006 progress report covered a period of less than a year, and that comments from Plenary ought to take that into consideration in its assessment.

In his response to these comments, the Secretariat Director insisted on the value of networking in the initial implementation of GEOSS. He reminded Plenary that new activities, as well as the establishment of performance indicators, should be the responsibility of the Members and not the Secretariat. The performance indicators included in the Work Plan should be considered as an initial proposal.

The Chairman invited Members and Participating Organisations to review the list of performance indicators.

The 2006 General Report on GEOSS Progress (Document 16) was accepted by the Plenary.

2.2 Committee and Working Group Reports

Documents 17, 18, 19 and 20

Progress reports of the GEO Committees and Working Group were presented by Committee and Working Group Co-Chairs.

D. Hinsman presented the report of the Architecture and Data Management Committee (Document 17). He reported on the membership of the Architecture and Data Management Committee and its recent changes. Subsequently, he reported on the progress of the Architecture and Data Management tasks, emphasising the achievements of the core tasks, i.e. those concerned with building the architecture of the GEOSS.

E. Levy introduced the report of the Capacity Building Committee (Document 18) and emphasised the Capacity Building Strategy development and the organisation of Capacity Building workshops. He further gave an outlook on outstanding activities to be addressed in the near term, encouraging Members to engage in GEO capacity building efforts.

U. Gaertner presented the report of the Science and Technology Committee (Document 19). He reported on the different levels of achievement and the varying degrees of maturity of the scientific components of the tasks and informed the Plenary that a science plan was currently under development. He also gave some detailed information on the status of the tasks and encouraged Members to join tasks currently without co-lead and/or point of contact.

G. Foley gave an oral report of the activities of the User Interface Committee introducing also the changes on the membership composition. He reported on the Committee's meetings and the Communities of Practice. User approaches such as GMES and INSPIRE were contemplated as potential models with which to move forward. A link to GEONETCast had been established.

E. Bussoletti informed the Plenary about the work of the Working Group on Tsunami Activities (Document 20). This Working Group had had a slow start. He referred to discussions on potentially extending the mandate of the Working Group to hazards in general, and reported that the recommendation of the Working Group was to remain dedicated to Tsunami, but did not exclude the possibility that the Working Group might become part of a larger initiative/committee on hazards.

Following the presentations by the Committees and Working Group, the floor was opened for discussion.

The United Kingdom felt that the Science and Technology Committee hadn't needed to review its structure. Instead of orchestrating ideas, it should give advice to Plenary. As far as the Working Group on Tsunami Activities was concerned, the United Kingdom would rather see the Working Group as a Community of Practice or a Working Group, rather than a Committee.

Germany emphasised that in discussing its role, the Science and Technology Committee was addressing cross-cutting issues and that it required communication between Committees to improve the Committee's functioning.

Brazil was very satisfied with the progress of the Capacity Building Committee, in particular with its strategy document. A publication coordinated by GEO in this Social Benefit Area was announced as an in-kind contribution from Brazil.

Canada acknowledged the work done by the User Interface Committee and the Communities of Practice and encouraged extending participation as well as improving the linking to the GEO Website.

Canada encouraged the establishment of an (all-) Hazards Committee.

Australia felt that the Working Group on Tsunami Activities needed to stay focused on its task and should further practical, rather than theoretical, issues.

Uganda indicated that it was ready to contribute to the Capacity Building Committee and wished to join the Working Group on Tsunami Activities.

Portugal welcomed the proposal of the Capacity Building Committee in its strategy. It expressed its hope that the engagement of members did not lead to the promotion of national activities.

South Africa emphasises the importance of the Capacity Building strategy.

The United States echoed remarks of Canada on the Communities of Practice and their importance and quoted the mutual benefit of improved models and data. The strategy document of the Capacity Building Committee was welcomed.

The United Kingdom warned about increasing the number of Committees and expressed support for a new body for all Hazards, rather than an (additional) Working Group.

U. Gaertner welcomed the offer by the European Commission to join the Science and Technology Committee as Co-Chair.

India commended the Committee Co-Chairs on their work and emphasised how central the Capacity Building Committee's work for the success of GEO really was. It would further have to be ensured that there were different levels of capacity building and that the skill development and the processes for decision making were included in the Capacity Building Committee's activities and considerations.

IOC encouraged further emphasis on disaster reduction. The multi-hazard approach would have to be seen in the context of disaster response.

The Plenary took note of Documents 17, 18, 19 and 20 as well as the oral report of the User Interface Committee.

2.3 Future Reporting Schedule - Master Calendar 2007

Document 21

The Secretariat Director introduced the Future Reporting Schedule (Document 21). This document provides an overall planning of Committee meetings which would support a better interaction between Committees and the opportunity to fulfil all responsibilities. The schedule introduced a change in reporting frequency from four to three reports per year. The Director announced that a new GEO WebEx webconferencing facility is now available to all Committees and Task Teams.

Germany highlighted the importance of coordination between Committees through meetings of Committee Co-Chairs.

WMO challenged the practicality of co-location of Committee meetings after the next Co-Chairs' meeting. This would have to be reviewed.

Document 21, v2 was accepted by the Plenary.

3 SECRETARIAT OPERATIONS

3.1 Report on 2006 Resources and Expenditure

Document 15

The Secretariat Director introduced Document 15 which showed the contributions by Members and Participating Organizations to the Trust Fund.

South Africa specified that its contribution of 750,000 rands was meant to be extended for three years. South Africa encouraged GEO Members to pledge contributions over at least three years to be consistent with the Work Plan and allow the Secretariat to plan operations on a multi-year basis.

Germany pledged 100,000 Euros per year for 3 years.

The total amount of resources pledged at or after GEO-II which have been received in the Trust Fund amounts to CHF 3, 057, 401. Including the opening balance, the resources of the GEO Trust Fund in 2006 were CHF 4, 191, 992. This is significantly above both the projected level of expenditure at end 2006.

The current level of expenditure (at 31 October) is CHF 1, 779, 766 and current projections indicate an end-of-year expenditure at CHF 2,425,023, well below budget. This under-spending is due to the late arrival of experts in the Secretariat followed by the progressive initiation of Work Plan related activities. Expenditure will be at budget for staff costs and below budget on travel and programme costs. However, diagrams in Document 15 indicate that spending rates are now at budget on these two items.

Japan announced its contribution for 2006, including the sponsoring of an outreach event in January 2007. The "GEOSS Symposium on Integrated Observation for Sustainable Development in the Asia-Pacific Region (GEOSS AP Symposium)" will be held in Tokyo, Japan, on 11-12 January 2007. The event, which will be managed by the Remote Sensing Centre of Japan, will provide the opportunity to exchange views and expand knowledge of GEO and GEOSS in Asia and Pacific Regions. Event topics include monitoring ecosystems and biodiversity, forest fires, climate change and the water cycle, and space and in-situ observations for geohazard monitoring. Japan welcomed the general participation of the GEO community.

Australia recognized that, when working within the WMO system, budgeting can be difficult. It noted that continually develop budgets is important. It also said that GEO needs to make best possible use of financial resources. Australia suggested that a budget or finance committee be formed to look at outlays against the Work Plan.

Switzerland announced a new contribution of CHF 120,000 to be used for workshops in the Geneva area.

Document 15, v3 was accepted by the Plenary.

3.2 Resolution on Audit

Document 5

The Secretariat Director presented Document 5, which included the terms of reference governing the Audit. A resolution must be adopted by the Plenary to allow the Secretariat Director to hire the auditor of the GEO Trust Fund. Because the Trust Fund is administered within the WMO accounting system, the Secretariat is proposed to hire the same auditor as WMO. The Executive Committee reviewed the document and introduced a change in Chapter IV, Item 7: “with copy to the Secretariat Director”.

With the change proposed by the Executive Committee, Document 5, v2 was adopted by the Plenary.

3.3 Guidelines for Additional Contributions

Document 6

The Secretariat Director introduced Document 6. According to this document, the Secretariat records additional contributions when they are pledged. The Secretariat operates according to the budget. Additional contributions pledged after budget approval at Plenary remain in the Trust Fund. In the event that pledged contributions are not contributed, additional contributions will be used to maintain a balanced budget.

Discussion ensued on the creation of a finance committee.

Australia proposed that a finance committee be formed, and that Paragraph 6 of Document 6 be revised to include the statement “with review by Finance Committee”. The Secretariat expressed the view that the Executive Committee was the de facto finance committee. The Secretariat offered to put this proposal on the agenda of the next Executive Committee. Opinions were also offered that there should not be any additional committees unless absolutely necessary.

The United States Co-Chair proposed to put the question of a finance committee to the Executive Committee, and requested input from the Committees. This proposal was accepted.

United Kingdom suggested that a short summary be added at the beginning of documents that present changes. It would help move things forward in future Plenaries and help further inform the regions on GEO activities.

Document 6 was adopted by the Plenary.

4 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE TERMS

Documents 7 and 7a, 8 and 9

The Chairman introduced Item 4, Executive Committee Terms. He reported that the Executive Committee had developed a simplified “way forward” document (Document 7a) on this subject, introducing a set of principles to guide the Executive Committee selection process. The Secretariat distributed the new document to the Plenary. Canada indicated that it wanted to address the single new proposal tabled at Plenary rather than discuss the two proposals in tandem as that might lead to a protracted and confused discussion. After interventions from Australia, the European Commission, the United States, and others two additions were proposed (see below in bold) and the following way forward was accepted by consensus:

STEP 1: Plenary extends the term of the current Executive Committee through the GEO 2007 Ministerial Meeting.

STEP 2: Plenary amends the Rules of Procedure, Section 3, Executive Committee as follows:

- 3.4 Selection. Executive Committee Members, including those Members serving as Co-Chairs, will be nominated through regional caucuses. Based on the conclusions of the regional caucuses and further consultations as necessary, the Director of the Secretariat will present a slate of nominees, including those nominated to serve as Co-Chairs, to the Plenary for its approval. Upon approval, Executive Committee members will serve a term of **up to** two years. The process will be guided by the following principles: (1) preserving sufficient continuity in the Executive Committee's membership; (2) ensuring sufficient opportunity for participation of GEO Members in the Executive Committee by rotation; (3) preserving the balance of developed and developing countries at the level of the Co-Chairs. **If a Member chooses not to complete its term of service, then the regional caucus may select another Member to represent it in the Executive Committee to complete the remaining term of service.**

STEP 3 Plenary amends the Rules of Procedure Section 2, Plenary, to clarify the role of the GEO Co-Chairs:

- 2.3 GEO Co-Chairs. Four GEO Members will Co-Chair meetings of the Plenary and the Executive Committee. The composition of and method of selection for the Co-Chairs is provided in Rule 3.3 and 3.4. Between Executive Committee meetings, the Co-Chairs will act on behalf of the Executive Committee to provide guidance to the Secretariat and will report to the Executive Committee on actions taken.

With the above additions, Document 7b was adopted by the Plenary.

5 GEO WORK PLAN 2007 TO 2009

5.1 2007 to 2009 Work Plan

Documents 11, 12 and 13 (Document 10 provides additional information)

The Director of the GEO Secretariat introduced the GEO 2007-2009 Work Plan (Document 11), the GEO Outreach Plan (Document 12) and the Capacity Building Strategy emphasizing the following points:

- The GEO 2007-2009 Work Plan is a three-year "living" document, with the possibility of an update once a year (as indicated in the GEO Master Schedule for 2007, Document 21).
- The GEO 2007-2009 Work Plan was developed under several constraints: (i) continuity with the GEO 2006 Work Plan; (ii) two- and six-year GEOSS Target objectives; (iii) reduction of the total task number (91 tasks in the 2006 Work Plan to 72 tasks in the 2007-2009 Work Plan Version 3).
- Version 3 of the GEO 2007-2009 Work Plan was prepared taking into account official comments by GEO Members and Participating Organizations. Section 16 on "Performance Indicators" was based on Chapter 9 of the GEOSS 10-Year Implementation Plan Reference Document.
- The tasks in the GEO 2007-2009 Work Plan were designed to build upon the mobilization of 2006 and drive the overall GEO process toward convergence. They aim to demonstrate the added value of GEO, engage broader communities, and initiate more cross-disciplinary actions.

Members and Participating Organizations were then invited to provide comments on the 2007-2009 Work Plan, a summary of which is provided below:

POGO (Partnership for Observations of the Global Ocean) expressed, on behalf of the Ocean Community, strong support for the 2007-2009 Work Plan. POGO recommended (i) addressing slowly-developing risks such as ocean acidification (Disasters); (ii) establishing a global observation programme support-centre servicing all in-situ ocean observing systems (Climate); (iii) collaborating with the Census of Marine Life (Biodiversity); (iv) making operational a backbone satellite observation system consisting of sea-surface temperature, sea surface colour, sea surface topography and waves (Architecture); and (v) setting a few outreach priorities (e.g., on climate change, geo-hazards and the water cycle).

Croatia emphasized the relevance of WIS (WMO Information System) as a core component of GEOSS and requested devoting an individual 2007-2009 Work Plan task to WIS contribution to GEOSS.

Australia supported POGO's comment on slowly-developing risks and Croatia's intervention on WIS. Indeed Australia re-emphasized the significance of WIS for GEOSS.

Brazil expressed satisfaction at Version 3 of the 2007-2009 Work Plan, however requesting that the motivation for, and added value of, each Work Plan task be outlined. In addition, Brazil recommended that the list of performance indicators presented in Section 16 be reviewed and streamlined. With regard to the Outreach Plan, Brazil considered that objectives could be better defined and slogans better targeted. Brazil pointed out that any cost-benefit analysis of Earth observations should take into account country specificities and differences between developed and developing countries; also success stories in developing countries should be given relevant emphasis.

Canada expressed satisfaction at Version 3 of the 2007-2009 Work Plan and recommended that GEO develop performance indicators and metrics on outcomes rather than on progress, with the help of Committees. Such indicators, if meaningful and comparatively high-level, could help promote GEO success stories in all contexts (including the 2007 Ministerial Meeting).

The Netherlands expressed support for the 2007-2009 Work Plan and reaffirmed their lead on Work Plan task CB-07-01b ("Identifying Best Practices, Gaps and Needs"). The Netherlands announced additional contributions to the 2007-2009 Work Plan including one contribution to Climate task CL-06-03 (Key Terrestrial Observations for Climate); to be realized through the implementation of the GCOS (Global Climate Observing System) Action Plan for Africa, for which the Netherlands will donate 1M USD over the next four years.

The United Kingdom expressed satisfaction at Version 3 of the 2007-2009 Work Plan. However, it urged an early identification of clear objectives in the Work Plan and Outreach Plan to allow for a realistic evaluation of progress. The United Kingdom suggested briefly outlining the GEO added value vis-à-vis individual Work Plan tasks in the Work Plan document, as a means of easily identifying points of focus in the preparation of the 2007 Ministerial Meeting.

The Russian Federation expressed general support for the 2007-2009 Work Plan as a living document. The Russian Federation emphasized the relevance of WIS to GEOSS and requested devoting an individual 2007-2009 Work Plan task to WIS contribution to GEOSS.

Switzerland expressed support for the 2007-2009 Work Plan and interest in contributing to several Disasters, Climate and Health Work Plan tasks, consistent with national GAW (Global Atmosphere Watch) and GCOS activities. In addition, Switzerland recommended that Committees (i) consider merging new and continuing Work Plan tasks, (ii) seek to identify inter-task synergies, and (iii) ensure appropriate cross-committee coordination. With regard to performance indicators, Switzerland considered that the list presented in Section 16 should be streamlined and some indicators merged. Switzerland suggested developing an indicator for the degree of completeness of task implementation (e.g. in terms of a percentage of the yearly objective).

Japan expressed support for the 2007-2009 Work Plan and emphasized the importance of "Convergence of observations" in the GEOSS process and expressed an expectation that more efforts will be made to facilitate "Convergence of observation" by ADC and UIC. Japan affirmed its strong

commitment to the development of arrangements for convergence within GEOSS, through the Implementation of Work Plan Task DA-07-06 (Data Integration and Analysis System).

South Africa expressed satisfaction at Version 3 of the 2007-2009 Work Plan and interest in participating in GEO activities related to Data Management (including data sharing and data dissemination). South Africa also reported the increasing involvement of national institutions in the GEO process.

Germany expressed support for the 2007-2009 Work Plan as a living document and emphasized the need for significant achievements by the time of the 2007 Ministerial Meeting. Achievements would be concrete projects pointing to the merit and added value of GEO. Germany invited the GEO community to suggest means of achieving major progress on GEOSS in the next few months, not starting from scratch, but building on existing work and experience. With regard to performance indicators, Germany suggested streamlining and improving the list presented in Section 16.

Spain announced a major Symposium on Capacity Building, to be held in Madrid in spring 2007 in support of Work Plan task CB-07-01 (Capacity Building Strategy Implementation). The Symposium will help initiate a dialogue with international donors and encourage key actors to support Earth observation capacity building. The target audience will include international funding agencies, aid agencies, foundations, the private sector as well as users, GEO Members and Participating Organizations.

ICSU (International Council of Scientific Unions) expressed support for the 2007-2009 Work Plan as a living document. However, it recommended further reducing the number of tasks and setting clear priorities under the guidance of the GEO Plenary (achieving prioritization at international level should be part of GEO added value). Moreover, ICSU recommended including socio-economic aspects to the GEO process and better acknowledging the individual systems underlying GEOSS implementation. ICSU also suggested that addressing the Targets of the 10-year Implementation Plan might not have to be a systematic process. With regard to the Millennium Development Goals, ICSU considered that a separate Work Plan task (US-07-02) was not justified (GEOSS implementation as a whole represents a contribution to the Millennium Development Goals).

DIVERSITAS, in its new capacity of GEO Participating Organization, emphasized continuity between Work Plan tasks BI-07-01 (Biodiversity Observation and Monitoring Network) and BI-06-02 (Biodiversity Requirements in Earth Observation), and the need for the same contributors to be involved in both tasks. DIVERSITAS recommended developing one GEOSS biodiversity monitoring system only and hence merging the two Biodiversity tasks BI-07-02 (Invasive Species Monitoring System) and BI-07-01.

India expressed support for the 2007-2009 Work Plan as a living document. India which has extensive experience in using Earth observations (e.g., in water management, sustainable agriculture, and biodiversity conservation), urged GEO Members to share success-story experience in the utilization of Earth observations on the ground. India also expressed interest in participating in GEO Capacity Building activities (including training) and willingness to contribute global satellite data to GEOSS (e.g. ocean-observing satellite data).

Italy expressed appreciation for Version 3 of the 2007-2009 Work Plan. However, it suggested that Committees and GEO Members increase their responsibility in the GEO process. Italy recommended a top-down approach to Work Plan task definition and prioritization (combined with a global, clearly-stated strategy) and a role for Committees to help with prioritization (Committees could develop a prioritization proposal in turn submitted for review and approval to the Plenary). With regard to the 2007 Ministerial Meeting, Italy suggested preparing a clear and short list of potential achievements (rather than “low hanging fruits”). This list could be initially developed by the GEO Secretariat and further reviewed by the Executive Committee. In addition, concise documents based on meaningful indicators could be developed. Italy noted the participation of the GEO Secretariat in a number of workshops and meetings, the relevance of which would ideally be assessed by Committees in the

future. With regard to developing countries, Italy strongly emphasized the need to encourage their participation in the GEO process, including attendance at Plenary meetings.

China welcomed the 2007-2009 Work Plan document and expressed interest in contributing to Work Plan tasks EN-07-03 (Energy Policy Planning), WE-06-03 (THORPEX Interactive Global Grand Ensemble TIGGE), WE-07-02 (Weather Demonstration Project for the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games) and CB-06-04 (GEONETCast). China also suggested extending the target audience of GEO Outreach activities to children and teenagers, as expressed in Outreach Plan, Section 4.1.

Slovenia expressed support for the 2007-2009 Work Plan and affirmed a strong commitment to drought management in the future. In effect, Slovenia will host the “Drought Management Centre for South Eastern Europe” following a decision announced last September in a meeting jointly hosted by WMO (World Meteorological Organization) and UNCCD (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification). This should serve as an operational centre for drought monitoring, preparedness and management in South Eastern Europe, and gradually represent a significant contribution to GEOSS.

WMO expressed appreciation at Version 3 of the 2007-2009 Work Plan and affirmed its commitment to GEO and to the GEOSS process. Indeed the WMO Executive Council agreed that all essential data, as defined by WMO Congress Resolution 40, should be made available through the GEOSS interoperable arrangements to serve the needs of the global community. These data, which are provided by the WMO’s 187 nation members, will contribute to support seven of the GEO societal benefit areas, namely Weather, Water, Climate, (hydro-meteorological) Disasters, Health, Energy and Agriculture. In addition, the WMO Commission on Basic Systems agreed that linguistic support would be an issue for GEO to address as a matter of urgency. He reported that, at a recent meeting where the Secretariat Director introduced GEO, the Heads of Meteorological and Hydrological Services from Ibero-America countries expressed the need for more information on GEO in Spanish. With regard to the GEO Work Plan and Committees, WMO emphasized its continuous high-level of involvement. WMO is committed to lead, or contribute to, over 40 of the 2007-2009 Work Plan tasks. With the Work Plan structure, WMO suggested adding an introduction outlining the vision to which individual tasks contribute.

GCOS expressed satisfaction at Version 3 of the 2007-2009 Work Plan and highlighted an agreement with WCRP (World Climate Research Programme) to converge future GEO Climate tasks toward three main streams: (1) Sustained reprocessing and reanalysis efforts, (2) Climate observations in response to the GCOS Implementation Plan (including in-situ network reinforcement), and (3) Seamless weather and climate prediction. GCOS/WCRP expressed support for cross-cutting activities within GEO, and developments not only in the climate domain but also in societal benefit areas which can benefit from "climate information". GCOS/WCRP confirmed their contribution to numerous 2007-2009 Work Plan tasks in a variety of societal benefit areas including Climate, Water, Weather, Agriculture, Data Management, User Engagement, and Capacity Building.

The European Commission expressed support for the 2007-2009 Work Plan as a living document. However, it underlined the need for improvements, under the guidance of Committees. The European Commission offered to provide suggestions for improvements to be discussed by Committees and reviewed by the Executive Committee. The European Commission offered to become a Co-Chair of the Science & Technology Committee.

IOC (Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission) affirmed its support to GEOSS implementation and interest in the overall potential of the GEO process. IOC recommended focusing more on the substance than on form, and on a few high-profile tangible outcomes delivered specifically as a result of the advent of GEO. In this respect, IOC emphasized the need for a major communication effort in preparation of the 2007 Ministerial Meeting.

CEOS (Committee on Earth Observation Satellites) affirmed the commitment of its Plenary members to better coordinate, build and maintain the space component of GEOSS; and respond to the needs expressed through GEO societal benefit areas. CEOS reported contributions to a significant number of 2006 Work Plan tasks including CL-06-02 (Key Climate Data from Satellite Systems): CEOS

prepared a response to the GCOS Implementation Plan in the form of a report "Satellite Observation of the Climate System". The Executive Summary of this report, entitled "The Way Forward" emphasizes the importance of both in-situ and satellite-based measurements for a range of societal benefit areas and aspects of data calibration, validation & reprocessing. CEOS indicated strong commitment to collaborate with CGMS (Co-ordination Group for Meteorological Satellites) and the WMO Space Programme on a range of GEO activities, including Work Plan task DA-07-03 (Virtual Constellations).

The United States expressed support for the 2007-2009 Work Plan as a living document and for Work Plan task DA-07-03 (Virtual Constellations) in particular. The United States emphasized the importance of developing good performance measures and metrics for GEOSS outcomes and volunteered to be part of such an effort within the GEO community.

UNOOSA reaffirmed its commitment to GEOSS and reported on the activities of the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs that have contributed to the GEOSS 2006 activities. UNOOSA reported the excellent collaboration with the GEO Secretariat which had to a more streamlined definition and the implementation of the United Nations Platform for Space-based Information for Disaster Management and Emergency Response UNOOSA/SPIDER. SPIDER is likely to begin activities in 2007 with offices in Beijing (China), Bonn (Germany) and Vienna (Austria). UNOOSA highlighted a significant contribution to the successful conclusion of 2006 Work Plan task DI-06-12 (Initiate a Knowledge-Transfer Programme to Developing Countries to Ensure Basic Capacity to Utilize Earth Observations for Disaster Management). With regard to the 2007-2009 Work Plan, UNOOSA expressed interest in contributing through SPIDER to selected Disasters, User Engagement, and Architecture tasks.

EuroGeoSurveys (Association of European Geological Surveys) expressed specific support for Work Plan tasks AR-07-01 (Interoperability Arrangements for GEOSS) and HE-07-02 (Environment and Health Monitoring and Modelling). Moreover, EuroGeoSurveys highlighted a practical contribution to Disasters, Health, Water and Agriculture societal benefit areas, in the form of a European Geochemical Atlas for metal contents of soil and water (available on CDroms). EuroGeoSurveys welcomed any collaboration with GEO Members to extend this Atlas to other regions of the world.

UNESCO reported contributions to the GEO 2006 Work Plan in the Disasters, Water, Ecosystems and Biodiversity areas. UNESCO indicated strong motivation to contribute to GEO Capacity Building activities in 2007-2009. UNESCO is currently Chair of the CEOS Working Group on Education and Capacity Building. UNESCO recommended increasing the Capacity Building focus within GEO and strengthening ties with UN Agencies and the ICSU Union on Geology to better reach out for civil society members and explain the GEO contribution to sustainable development, especially in 2008, the International Year of Planet Earth. UNESCO offered to become a Co-Chair of the Capacity Building Committee.

IAG (International Association for Geodesy) expressed support for the 2007-2009 Work Plan as a living document and reported significant contributions to GEOSS through the Global Geodetic Observing System (GGOS). IAG mentioned the key role of Communities of Practice in helping to identify user requirements. In this respect, IAG proposed a new Work Plan task in the User Engagement area: "Establish a comprehensive GEOSS database of user requirements concerning georeferencing and geodetic reference frames by identifying, describing and establishing links to relevant user communities in the nine societal benefit areas and conducting appropriate surveys".

GTOS (Global Terrestrial Observing System) expressed support for the 2007-2009 Work Plan and appreciation for ICSU's comment on individual observing systems providing a foundation for GEOSS. GTOS also expressed concern over the possible dilution of the importance of the looming data gap in fine resolution data (in particular for terrestrial systems that are critical for land-cover mapping, land cover monitoring, and change detection). GTOS emphasized that it was important not to allow data continuity issues (and upcoming data gaps) to be somehow hidden within the new Work Plan task DA-

07-03 (Virtual Constellations). GTOS recommended that Committees advise the GEO Secretariat on workshop and meeting attendance.

Italy expressed support for IAG intervention and willingness to participate in a United States-led effort to develop metrics on outcomes for the GEO process.

IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers) expressed support for the 2007-2009 Work Plan, but considered, however, that the document could still be improved. First, tasks could be examined to reduce overlap and fill some gaps; the Plenary could set as an objective for the Committees and the GEO Secretariat to have an initial operating capability for architecture before November 2007. Second, the cross-cutting nature of GEOSS could be emphasized. With regard to Outreach and Capacity Building activities, IEEE suggested addressing the younger generation, the constituents for a continuation of GEOSS beyond the 10-year Plan. IEEE informed the GEO Plenary that it had made an internal commitment for three years to support GEO and that it would provide substantial efforts in Architecture, Capacity Building and Outreach.

The Director of the GEO Secretariat welcomed offers of contributions and thanked the GEO community for their support and commitment. In response to specific queries, the Director indicated the following:

- The Census of Marine Life will be referred to in Climate Task Sheet CL-06-06.
- WIS is a highly valuable GEOSS system-component that will be made available through the GEOSS interoperability arrangements. However, there are other GEOSS components, whether observing components or information systems, that will gradually be made available through the GEOSS interoperability arrangements, including GEONETCast, ESA/HMA, Sentinel Asia, FDSN and others. All these systems should be contributed through a simple common process as defined by Work Plan Task AR-07-04 (GEOSS Components Commitment).
- The list of performance indicators presented in Section 16 of the Work Plan will be streamlined and improved with the support of the GEO community.
- The use of socio-economic data to implement and further GEOSS will be strongly encouraged.
- Individual systems contributing to GEOSS will be acknowledged as appropriate.
- Biodiversity tasks BI-07-01 and BI-07-02 will be merged.
- There is regrettably only one GEO official language, English; GEO Members are invited to support Outreach activities by making documentation available in other languages. The Director mentioned that China has already translated the 10-year Plan in Chinese.
- To introduce vision statements in the Work Plan would not be consistent with the Work Plan focus on task and activity description.
- A World Geochemical Atlas would be a great objective for GEO to achieve in the coming months. The Atlas data could be made available through the Web-Portal and the Clearing House.
- Data Management task DA-07-03 (Virtual Constellations) is strongly user-driven and thus appropriately allocated to the User Interface Committee.
- GEO should be able to deliver selected GEOSS components and architecture elements by November 2007.

In conclusion to the Session:

Spain proposed to initiate the translation of GEO official documents in Spanish. Portugal proposed to do the same in Portuguese.

The United States Co-Chair emphasized the complexity of the overall GEO process and underlying challenge to evaluate GEO added value. GEO added value can be found at a variety of levels - from individual system-piece to high-level coordination.

The European Commission Co-Chair outlined the process that will accompany the revision of the Work Plan: Committees will consider changes to the document on the basis of the foregoing discussion and submit these changes for review to the Executive Committee. Once reviewed and agreed upon by the Executive Committee, these changes will be implemented by the GEO Secretariat and eventually submitted for approval to the Plenary.

With regard to the 10-Year Implementation Plan and Reference Document, the European Commission Co-Chair suggested that the Executive Committee evaluate the need for making adjustments and possibly develop a proposal, to be reviewed by the Plenary and eventually submitted for approval to the Ministers.

The GEO 2007-2009 Work Plan (Document 11) was accepted by the Plenary as a living document and will be subject to annual updates.

5.2 Near-Term Successes

Document 23

The Secretariat Director introduced the list of “Near-Term Successes” (Document 23). He specified that,

- The list was prepared at the request of the GEO Committee Co-Chairs and the Executive Committee.
- The list is not exhaustive and still to be reviewed by Committees.
- The order of presentation on the list is not an indication of priority. It simply reflects the order in which societal benefit areas are presented in the Work Plan.
- The list items, or so-called Near-Term Successes, are based on the tasks outlined in the GEO Work Plan. These tasks have been identified as most likely to provide demonstrable success of GEOSS within the first two-years, in time for the GEO 2007 Ministerial meeting. The Near-Term Successes have been given special titles for outreach purposes that will be easily understood by decision-makers and the general public.
- Most of the Near-Term Successes represent new initiatives that build on existing systems, which must be further developed in the context of GEO through strengthened partnerships among GEO Members and Participating Organizations. These consist of projects at two levels of maturity (a) those that will deliver concrete tools, products, information services, or agreements by November 2007 or (b) significant high-profile projects that will be initiated by November 2007.
- The reference to “low hanging fruit” will be removed from all documents.

Canada emphasized the importance of the 2007 Ministerial Meeting and the need for the GEO community to engage in the preparation of solid documents “efficiently communicating the GEO message” by November 2007. A document on “Near-Term Successes” should be connected to the GEO 10-year Implementation Plan vision and targets. Canada volunteered to be part of a drafting committee that would work with the GEO Secretariat on the development of 2007 Ministerial Meeting documents, and help identify outcomes, challenges, and performance indicators to be presented to the Ministers.

The United States supported Canada’s proposal and suggested that the GEO community build on United States experience of “Near-Term Opportunities” concept and documents (see USGEO website, <http://usgeo.gov>).

Italy proposed to replace the phrase “Near-Term Successes” with “Potential Achievements” and to streamline the list down to two or three key elements achievable by November 2007. Italy supported Canada’s proposal to set up a drafting committee and offered to participate.

Brazil supported Italy’s suggestion to refer to “Potential Achievements” and emphasized the need to consider all regions for such achievements.

Germany referred to synergies that should be made with high-profile international programmes, e.g. with the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change). Germany considered that GEO benefits and outcomes at the national level should be a criterion for success or achievement. With regard to the 2007 Ministerial Meeting, Germany urged the GEO community to start its preparation with no delay.

France considered that GEO still had to demonstrate the usefulness of the integrated concept underlying GEOSS. With regard to Near-Term Successes, France suggested considering successful GMES fast-track services. France also requested clarification on the “Beijing Olympics High-Precision Weather Project”.

The United Kingdom supported Canada’s proposal as a means to ensure that key GEO challenges will be identified and well-marketed to the Ministers.

ICSU supported Italy’s recommendation to replace the word “success” and streamline the list down to a few items demonstrating GEO added-value and promising, concrete outcomes.

WMO supported the idea of a drafting committee and general strategy towards the preparation of the 2007 Ministerial Meeting. Maximum impact should be the target, and a plan to inform Ministers and encourage them to attend the Meeting should be consistently designed. Demonstrations performed over the Meeting, and thoroughly tested in advance, should also help reinforce the GEO message to Ministers.

IGBP (International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme) recommended shortening the list of “Near-Term Successes” and emphasizing the value of the networks that GEO helped develop.

IOC pointed out that much of its work is supported by GEO Members and contributing to the GEO process and that IOC achievements in many ways should also be regarded as GEO achievements. IOC emphasized GEO’s potential for providing high-level visibility and volunteered to help drafting documents in support of the 2007 Ministerial Meeting.

ESA (European Space Agency) supported IOC position and noted that many of the activities conducted in preparation of Nairobi’s UNFCCC Conference (e.g., GCOS Plan) were also contributing to GEOSS implementation. ESA offered to share its experience in the organization of Ministerial-level meetings. Moreover ESA volunteered to support the GEO Secretariat and participate in a document drafting committee.

In concluding the Session, the United States Co-Chair encouraged GEO Members and Participating Organizations to propose tasks and ideas missing from the current list of “Near-Term Successes”, and to come forward with help to organize the Ministerial event. The United States Co-Chair emphasized the opportunity-character of the Ministerial Meeting to provide visibility to all GEO Member activities and achievements. With regard to a possible drafting committee, the United States Co-Chair suggested that the Executive Committee, with the support of the GEO Secretariat, first define the overall framework for the Ministerial Meeting preparation and then possibly recommend the setting-up of such a committee. In the meantime, GEO Members are invited to make suggestions on a skeleton preparatory framework and associated documents.

Document 23 was not accepted by the Plenary.

5.3 Matrix of GEO Member and Organization Engagement

The Director of the GEO Secretariat highlighted two points related to the initiation of the implementation of the GEO 2007-2009 Work Plan, now accepted by the Plenary:

- Each Work Plan Task has to be allocated to one or more of the four GEO Committees. A proposal for such an allocation has been proposed by the Secretariat (Document 22).
- GEO Members and Participating Organizations are now formally invited to declare their intention to lead, or contribute to, individual Work Plan tasks. Details of participation, including participant contact information, should be sent to the GEO Secretariat.

5.4 2007 to 2009 Budget

Document 14

The Secretariat Director presented the Secretariat Operations Budget for 2007 and Projected Expenses for 2008-2009 (Document 14). He outlined that with the anticipated under-spending in 2006 operations budget approximately CHF 1.1 million will be carried forward from 2006. In addition, all contributions pledged since GEO-II remain in the Trust Fund. Additional contributions from Korea, Germany, the European Commission, the United States and South Africa have already been indicated. With in kind contributions in the form of office space (from WMO) and seconded experts, the total amount of resources readily available is above CHF 6 million. The budget presented, therefore, requests a level of expenditure of CHF 5,892,480 for 2007, with comparable levels of spending in 2008 and 2009. The Director noted that it was intended to introduce the concept of “off-site” contractors for specific activities within Member countries and Participating Organisations. This is motivated by the need for such “local” contractors to support national activities, as well as the lack of office space in the WMO building. As these contractors would be less expensive, this would also contribute to lowering expenditure.

China announced a contribution of USD 80,000.

Australia said that this was an excellent budget and commented that, while it was not appropriate to analyse the details of the budget in Plenary, an additional informal opportunity to scrutinise the budget details would improve the transparency of the process, e.g., in relation to details of costs of meetings and workshops.

Canada echoed Australia’s comments and announced an unspecified contribution. They would be able to give further details on the amount of their planned contribution in a few weeks time.

Argentina stated their intention to extend their contribution of USD 14,000 to 2007.

The United States announced an initial contribution of USD 250,000, pending further on-going United States budget discussions.

IEEE asked whether Operations budget could be used to outreach activities if no Member volunteered for next year’s key tasks of producing a data clearinghouse and a portal.

Germany stated their willingness to accept/approve the budget, while noting that the Executive Committee still officially needed to give its recommendation to Plenary on the budget.

The Secretariat Director responded to these interventions by thanking the Members for their contributions. He explained that most funds for meetings go toward supporting developing country participation (CHF 95,000 had been allocated and spent to this end throughout 2006). He acknowledged the important point made by IEEE regarding contractors. He emphasised that the hiring of contractors to implement tasks for GEO would be a new departure for GEO. He stated that, if this was needed, the approval of the Plenary was required to initiate the competitive tender process.

Italy thanked the Secretariat for the outline of the planned spending but commented that only a small amount of money had been used for developing country participation. Italy drew the inference from a number of empty chairs in the Plenary that the amount of money allocated was not enough. The Italian

delegation then formally requested that 10% of all GEO funds be used for developing country participation.

The Secretariat Director explained that all requests to attend the Plenary had been funded, and that, in fact, in three cases, participants, for whom travel arrangements had been made, were not in attendance. He responded to Italy's proposal by saying that he felt that 10% may be more than what would be required, but would take direction from the Plenary.

Morocco expressed the view that it would be more in the interest of developing countries to have access to operational data and information systems than to have more funds for travel.

Italy said they shared Morocco's concern but shared the parable of "teaching people to fish, rather than feeding them", making the point that both actions were needed. Italy considered insufficient to provide technology without affording the means to be present at the decision-making fora. He also said that the Secretariat clearly could not do anything more than fund requests it received, but that perhaps there was a failure to attract developing countries to GEO.

Uganda expressed appreciation for developing country support, but highlighted the practical difficulty of developing country participants obtaining visas. They suggested that GEO should make political efforts to assist in this process or to hold meetings in places where visa restrictions are not onerous.

Germany mentioned that they had worked hard to ensure all participants got visas despite the fact that the decision to hold the Plenary in Bonn was only taken in September.

The Chairman expressed his thanks to Germany for their help in organising the Plenary.

At this point, the budget (Document 14, v2) was proposed for acceptance by Plenary.

Before accepting the budget, Italy made a formal request to know whether their proposal on fixing the level of developing country travel funding was adopted or not.

IEEE also sought clarification from the Plenary on the possibility to place contracts for architecture components implementation.

In response to the IEEE question, the United States Co-chair said that this was indeed a new development and that to date the Plenary had sought a lean Secretariat which facilitates and coordinates Members and Participating Organisations activities but does not directly spend resources on implementation. He sought Members' comments.

The European Commission Co-chair commented that the Secretariat budget of CHF 6,000,000 was a small fraction of the total spend on GEO activities and that this limited budget should not have money specifically earmarked for developing country participation, but that the GEO process as a whole should aim to have as much money as required available for this activity.

Morocco expressed agreement with the budget and said that detailed analysis could be left to the Executive Committee and the Co-chairs.

The United Kingdom expressed the need for more time to consider the new issues which could change the modus operandi of GEO.

Germany said "no" on the question of operational commitments and "no" on the Italian proposal, since all travel requests had been satisfied and there was therefore no need to over-regulate the budget process.

Norway echoed the German position.

Canada also agreed with Germany and Norway, but expressed the view that the engagement of contractors for operational issues was inevitable and that the Executive Committee should prepare a position on this for the future.

The United States supported the comments made by the European Commission Co-chair, Norway and Germany, commenting that earmarking a set amount of funds for developing country participation was not appropriate.

France also supported the views of the other delegations but recommended that the Secretariat do its best to ensure developing country participation, but without earmarking a set amount.

Argentina reminded the Plenary not to lose sight of the original concept of GEO in analysing the budget, that of a joint venture in which everybody supplies and everybody receives. They noted Morocco's view that the most important thing was to get information, and that Italy had said that both issues needed to be addressed. They informed the Plenary that thanks to the support from USGS and CEOS, they were able to hold a workshop on new tools impacting the GEO Social Benefit Areas.

Italy accepted the position of the Plenary but again commented that both issues were needed, as Argentina had agreed.

The Chair strongly encouraged the Plenary to provide more money for developing country participation.

The United States Co-chair felt GEO had strongly supported developing country travel and noted that individual Members had provided funds when they were required. He also agreed with the Canadian proposal that the Executive Committee should prepare a position on engaging implementing contractors.

Following this debate, the budget was accepted by consensus of Plenary.

At this point, the Chair proposed to take Item 6 in the agenda and invited the Co-chair from South Africa to make a presentation, since he would have to leave early.

6 ANNOUNCEMENT OF GEO-IV AND 2007 GEO MINISTERIAL

The Co-Chair of South Africa announced that the Department of Science and Technology of the Republic of South Africa is offering to host the GEO-IV Plenary Meeting on 28 and 29 November 2007 and the following GEO Ministerial Meeting on 30 November 2007 at the Cape Town Convention Centre. A video about Cape Town and surroundings was presented.

7 WORK PLAN 2007 TO 2009 (CONTINUED)

7.1 Review of Committees and Working Groups

Comments were invited on Committees and the Working Group.

Italy reminded everyone of the issue of establishing a Working Group or a Committee on Disasters. They noted that there were some expressed positions for and some against. They asked whether the United Kingdom's objection automatically invalidates the potential to establish a Committee or Working Group on Disasters.

Germany was in favour of a Working Group on Disasters.

The European Commission agreed with the German position. They also requested Co-Chair positions on the Science and Technology Committee and the Architecture and Data Committee, noting that the European Commission had created a new unit for spatial data infrastructure.

Australia said it did not support an "all-hazards" Working Group and that the Working Group on Tsunami Activities should achieve its goals and then be dismantled.

Canada supported the German view, but agreed with the Australian position of creating it to carry out its work within a specific timeframe, e.g., until the Ministerial.

France mentioned the creation of SPIDER and said it was important for GEO to be a focal point on disasters. They were in favour of a Working Group with a clear mandate from the Executive Committee. They confirmed that the European Caucus agreed with the European Commission position on the new Co-Chairs for the Science and Technology Committee and the Architecture and Data Committee.

Norway stated that it set a bad precedent to have one Working Group for a Societal Benefit Area and that it was more logical to create a task to coordinate the disasters theme. Norway was against establishing a Working Group.

The IGBP suggested that rather than creating a new entity, the scope of the existing Working Group could be expanded. They supported the European Commission statement.

Uganda noted the constraints on volunteer organisations, especially from developing countries, in participating in Committees and requested that any help possible should be offered.

Italy informed France that terms of reference for the proposed Working Group had been circulated and that the Secretariat could provide them. They acknowledged that Working Groups should not exist forever but only as long as they are needed. He said that people had said they wanted to keep a focus on tsunamis as this is the real expertise of the working group.

Spain, as a Co-Chair of the Capacity Building Committee mentioned that there were proposals from the committee to change its terms of reference that required approval. They strongly supported that South Africa and UNESCO be given Co-Chair positions.

Italy appreciated this point but said what was required was to add to the activity not merely coordinate.

The United States Co-Chair said that the Working Group on Tsunami Activities produced a paper saying that an All-hazards Group was needed but that this paper had not been introduced in the Plenary. He noted that there should not be any problem with co-ordination since ISDR is a member of GEO. He proposed that the Plenary allow the Executive Committee find volunteers to populate a Disaster Working Group and establish terms of reference such that it would not cut across existing committees.

Norway said they still had a problem with this. While they appreciated disasters were important, this set a precedent for creating working Groups dedicated to Social Benefit Areas. It would lead to creating more new structures and that this was felt to be a problem.

EuroGeoSurveys agreed that it was not good to set up separate Working Groups for each area and that it was best to keep things simple.

The Secretariat Director noted the major reorganisation of the United Nations in the field of disasters and that so far GEO had acted to coordinate this activity. He suggested that if there were a new Working Group on Disasters that it should be careful not to duplicate activities.

WMO strongly agreed with the Secretariat Director but that if be such a group were to be created, WMO would volunteer to be involved. He urged others to follow the advice of the Secretariat Director.

IASA commented on the Charter on Disasters.

Italy said they knew of the United Nations issue. They suggested that the Plenary should take responsibility for this issue and not to overload the Secretariat. They said that they would like to be prepared and not establish a Working Group after a disaster happened.

The United States Co-Chair withdrew his proposal, explaining to Norway that he had not requested approval to establish a Working Group but just the go-ahead to explore the issues. He also felt that at some point it would be necessary to explore matrix-type structures, reflecting the complex nature of the real-world. He also noted that when the next world-wide disaster occurs, people will be asking what GEO has been doing about it.

China expressed support to the position of the United States Co-Chair and proposed that this issue be further discussed in Committees and by Executive Committee. Before closing the item, the list of Committee Co-chairs was clarified.

The following Co-Chair positions were agreed:

Capacity Building Committee: Brazil, Spain, UNESCO, European Commission and South Africa.

Science and Technology Committee: Germany, South Africa, European Commission, ICSU

User Interface Committee: Canada, Italy, United Kingdom, United States and IEEE.

1.9 Guidelines for recognition of Participating Organizations (continued)

The Secretariat presented a new draft for the Guidance for Recognition of New GEO Participating Organizations and Observers. This draft was accepted by the Plenary to become Annex C to the Rules of Procedure.

8 REVIEW OF MEETING OUTCOMES

The Secretariat Director went through the decisions that were made during the Plenary:

1. Acknowledgement of six new Members: Bahrain, Hungary, Moldova, Latvia, Paraguay, Uganda
2. Acceptance of GEO-II Summary (Document 2)
3. Recognition of three new Participating Organizations: DIVERSITAS, CGMS, IHO
4. Recognition of three observers: GEBCO, START, and eGY.
5. Acceptance of the Draft Guidance for Recognition of New GEO Participating Organizations and Observers (Document 4, v2)
6. Acceptance of the General Report on GEOSS Progress 2006 and the Reports of the GEO Committees and Working Group (Documents 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20)
7. Acceptance of the Master Schedule for 2007 (Document 21, v2)
8. Acceptance of the 2006 Report on Resource and Expenditures with Amendments (Document 15 v3)
9. Acceptance of the Resolution on Audit with Amendments (Document 5, v2)
10. Acceptance of the Guidelines for Additional Contributions (Document 6)
11. Acceptance of the Way Forward on Executive Committee Terms (Document 7b)
12. Acceptance of the 2007-2009 Work Plan as a living document to be updated annually, (Document 11), as well as the accompanying Outreach Plan (Document 12) and Capacity Building Strategy (Document 13). The Secretariat will prepare a document consolidating the remarks of Plenary for review by the GEO Committees.
13. Acceptance of the 2007 Budget with Amendments (Document 14, v3)
14. Renewal of the GEO Committees on Architecture and Data, Capacity Building, Science and Technology, and User Interface.
15. Renewal of the Working Group on Tsunami Activities
16. Confirmation of the date of the Fourth Plenary Session of the GEO on 28 and 29 November 2007 and the GEO 2007 Ministerial Meeting on 30 November 2007.
17. Agreement on a process for the preparation of the GEO 2007 ministerial.

9 SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS AND OTHER BUSINESS

The departure of the GEO Secretariat Executive Officer, Peter Colohan, was announced, WMO and the Secretariat Director acknowledged his excellent work in the Secretariat since the formation of the ad hoc GEO in 2003. Peter addressed the Plenary briefly, expressing his sincere appreciation of the entire GEO community, the importance of the work of GEO, and for the opportunity to work with them.

A film of GEONETCast was shown to the Plenary.

10 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The European Commission Co-Chair acknowledged the fact that the structure of GEO is quite well formalised, which is important to function properly, but mentioned that the Plenary could have spent more time discussing the GEO Work Plan and the future.

The South African Co-Chair stated that we have more clarity now on how to proceed towards the Ministerial meeting, which is going to be crucial for the future of GEO and that the level commitment is significant. Still, he saw the implementation of the GEO Work Plan to be challenging.

The United States Co-Chair thanked the Chairman for chairing the meeting. He thanked Germany for hosting the meeting. He thanked South Africa for the invitation to the next GEO Plenary in Cape Town. He was pleased to state that after the first full year of work, the Plenary discussions related more to the work than the process.

The Chairman thanked everybody for a successful meeting, but especially Germany for the excellent facilities and stated that he was looking forward to meeting in Cape Town next year.

The Chairman adjourned the meeting at 18.30.