

Contribution of Belgium to the EO-TOP IV - Cape Town - 30 November 2007

Speech by Ambassador Jan Mutton

Co-Chairs

Your Excellency Minister Mangena,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank the South African Government as well as the Secretariat of GEO for hosting and organizing this Ministerial Summit.

Belgium commends the political and technical progress made since the approval of the "10-year implementation plan" at the last EO-Top in Brussels in February 2005.

Since long my country has been deeply involved in earth observation and for more than 20 years it has had its own national research programme for observation by satellite. Belgium participates in the ESA and EUMETSAT programmes and also works together with France, among others, for SPOT and for PLEIADES, and with Argentina for SAOCOM.

Our country is actively involved in the development and implementation of GMES (Global Monitoring for Environment and Security), an initiative of the European Union, under which operational information services will be set up.

Our expertise is concentrated on supporting humanitarian aid, on high-resolution cartography for urban development policy, on mapping and monitoring coastal zones and tracking vegetation growth from the perspective of food security on the one hand and sustainable forest and environment on the other.

The VEGETATION instrument onboard of SPOT 4 and 5 is part of our cooperation with France as said before. This mission makes it possible to monitor the evolution of vegetation on a day to day basis throughout the world. With the knowledge which we have acquired in this mission and thanks to the development of our own mini-satellite, PROBA, Belgium is going to develop a satellite which will guarantee the continuity of the current VEGETATION data.

These missions give us the capacity to provide the information for making accurate worldwide harvest forecasts, among others. It is also a very powerful instrument for development cooperation and food security policy, particularly on the African continent.

Belgium is involved in many other earth observation activities in Africa, such as the distribution of earth observation data via satellite and training courses for the use of remote sensing. In collaboration with UNESCO and the European FORAF project (EC-CCR), a contribution is also being made to forest and world heritage mapping and monitoring in Central Africa.

One of the Belgian regions, Flanders, contributes to earth observation activities in Africa through a collaboration on the FET-Remens project to support surface water management. In the framework of the co-operation agreement it has with South Africa in the area of earth observation, Flanders is collaborating in the development of a hyperspectral sensor on board the South African earth observation satellite, Zosat.

These activities together with GEOSS can be an added value for Africa as well as for other areas around the world. Belgium wishes to especially emphasise that not only users from developed countries but also the users from developing countries have to be the driving force of GEO.

In consultation with the European partners, we will continue to participate actively in the strengthening of GEOSS on the political and technical levels.

Belgium endorses the Cape Town Declaration and assures GEO and GEOSS of its full and continued support.

Thank you for your attention.
