

GEO Ministerial Cape Town Summit

Statement by Brazil

Mr Chairman,

Distinguished Ministers and Representatives,

Allow me to express the gratitude of the Brazilian Government to South Africa for hosting this GEO Ministerial Summit in the beautiful city of Cape Town. This is yet another demonstration of South Africa's commitment to GEO's success.

Brazil has been an active member of GEO since the First Earth Observation Summit in 2003. Since then, GEO has made important strides, particularly in implementing its 10-Year Plan adopted in 2005.

Brazil has strived to play a positive role in this context. We had the privilege to serve as one of the representatives from the Americas in the GEO Executive Committee for 2006-2007.

As co-Chairs of the Capacity Building Committee, we have also sought to contribute to this critical area of GEO's work. Brazil hosted a Capacity Building Workshop in 2006 and the 'GEOSS in Americas' symposium this past September. We are committed to continuing to work hard in the area of capacity-building.

Experience with the use of land-imaging satellites shows that timely and quality earth observation data provides significant inputs to societal benefits associated with agriculture, deforestation assessment, disaster monitoring, drought relief, and land management, among others.

However, despite the success of Earth observation programs and the widespread availability of data, there is still an important "knowledge gap" when extracting information, particularly for developing countries. To a significant extent, we are failing to fully exploit the potential of spatial data we collect.

Much of this “knowledge gap” stems from an imbalance in public spending in geo-information technology. Major Earth observation satellite programs have budgets in the billion-dollar range, yet the resources dedicated to enabling users worldwide to make use of such data are a fraction of the cost of space-based systems.

There has been some progress made through GEO to establish an imaging satellite constellation that would provide timely 10-30 meter global land cover multi-spectral images for critical fast-response applications.

In partnership with China, Brazil is taking significant steps in this direction. The China-Brazil Earth Resources Satellite program – CBERS - is providing global coverage, using optical multi-spectral cameras. The most recent satellite in the CBERS family - CBERS-2B – was successfully launched in September 2007 and is now operational.

China and Brazil have adopted an open data distribution policy. CBERS images are available on the Internet, free to all users in China and in South America.

Brazil and China have also agreed on a far-reaching proposal for free distribution of CBERS data to African countries, a partnership that involves ground stations operated by Italy, South Africa and Spain.

The CBERS Program is by any measure a success story of fruitful South-South cooperation in outer space for exclusively peaceful purposes. It has become a significant tool to support decision-making in both Brazil and China – in Brazil alone, more than three hundred fifty thousand images have been freely distributed to both governmental and non-governmental users. But its benefits are also reaching many other countries in the developing world. Therefore, the CBERS Program is an initiative that should, in our view, receive the full support of the international community.

The CBERS free data distribution policy provides, in our view, an example of how GEOSS can play a key role in fostering the implementation of its data sharing principles worldwide. Brazil will adopt the same data policy for all of its Earth observation satellites, starting with Amazonia-1, to be launched in 2011, which will monitor deforestation in the tropics.

But the role of GEO in promoting the use of Earth Observation data for sustainable development must include capacity building in the use of space-based Earth Observation data. Brazil is actively engaged and supporting globally distributed open

source software as one of the capacity building tasks we are leading in GEO. We need to establish a global collaborative network of users and developers that can address the information needs of developing countries.

Combining open data access and open source software is the best way to join the efforts of developed and developing countries to promote the use of space-derived Earth Observation data for sustainable development. Brazil is working hard with its partners worldwide in support of these goals. We applaud the efforts of GEO to foster data sharing and capacity-building in all societal benefit areas as we continue to implement GEOSS.

Thank you