

Joint Statement for the GEO Cape Town Ministerial Summit

**by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO),
the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP),
the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
including its Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), and
the World Meteorological Organization (WMO)**

30 November 2007

Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) including its Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), and the Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) jointly wish to express our deepest thanks to the Government of the Republic of South Africa for hosting the Cape Town Ministerial Summit focusing on the theme "Earth Observation for Sustainable Growth and Development". We further wish to express our appreciation to all Group on Earth Observation (GEO) Members for the kind invitation made to our respective organizations to address the Summit on this auspicious occasion.

Over the years, the United Nations Specialized Agencies and Programmes have concentrated on the common goal of implementing a wide variety of observation, data processing and communication systems to address Earth observations. These systems have served both research purposes and practical applications to global needs such as monitoring of the environment, weather prediction, ocean science and services, climate and climate change studies, agriculture and food production, as well as the forewarning and alleviation of many types of natural disasters.

With these objectives in mind, our Members have undertaken the development and implementation of global, regional and national plans within the atmospheric, oceanic and terrestrial domains. We are confident that, collectively, our organizations and our partner space agencies facilitate and coordinate well over 80% of the existing observational capacity that contributes toward meeting our respective mandates as well as those of GEO.

Our vision of Earth observations is one in which all observing systems and supporting infrastructures will be truly global, comprehensive, coordinated and sustained so that all data and information are shared among all nations and the total system optimally addresses a broad range of societal benefits in the most effective and efficient way possible.

We applaud the statement that the GEO capacity building strategy will follow the World Summit on Sustainable Development concept of a global partnership between those whose capacity needs development and those who are able to assist in the process. Our organizations have a universal membership consisting of 193 Member States. Each organization collaborates with the others to ensure planning, implementation, operation and maintenance of effective and efficient observing systems as well as related data processing and exchange capability and delivery of services. Quite often these systems are shared by more than one of our agencies – but the implementation is undertaken by the Members

themselves. Many nations need support to build their capacity to be able to contribute to the global observing systems and to utilize fully the global observations and information that these systems provide.

We look forward to cooperating with GEO in undertaking an effective capacity building component of the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS) that will contribute to the universal implementation of the global observing systems. We are therefore encouraged by the fact that the Government of Spain recently hosted the 1st GEO-Donor Capacity Building Symposium, held in Seville last September under the title "Linking Strengths for Sustainable Earth Observations". We look forward to the results of that key symposium as an important first step for GEO to act as a catalyst to initiate all the capacity building activities that will contribute to the implementation of GEOSS.

Throughout the development of GEO, the UN system has remained committed to the goals and principles embraced in the GEOSS concept. Our respective organizations stand ready to continue to collaborate and cooperate with GEO in the further planning and implementation of GEOSS, using the GEOSS 10-Year Implementation Plan as a guide. We would welcome an arrangement under which the governance of GEOSS eventually becomes integrated with the UN system in a way that adds value to the various observing systems that are sponsored or co-sponsored by FAO, UNESCO including its IOC, UNEP, WMO and the non-governmental International Council for Science (ICSU).

Our organizations endorse the Services Oriented Architecture concept as the basis for the GEOSS architecture. This will ensure a common approach to enhance access to data and information through interoperability arrangements that are uniform across the diverse component systems that comprise GEOSS. Actions are already underway, in our respective organizations, to assist in defining the details and scope of the Architecture and to evaluate the impacts of applying this concept to our systems.

Our organizations would be pleased to contribute actively in making a reality the function of "consulting, coordinating and liaising with relevant UN specialized agencies and programmes and international scientific organizations" which is foreseen in the fundamentals for the creation of GEO. In this regard, we have established a mechanism, the Interagency Coordination and Planning Committee (ICPC) comprised of FAO, UNESCO including its IOC, UNEP, WMO and the non-governmental International Council for Science, which is designed to increase collectively the effectiveness of the systems for which we have responsibilities as well as to provide a mechanism for all of our organizations to interact with GEO on a continuing basis. We encourage the inclusion of other UN organizations, not yet represented in ICPC, that have programmes and systems that would contribute to GEO objectives. The location of the GEO Secretariat at the WMO Headquarters building in Geneva provides an excellent venue for coordination and we shall continue to seek ways and means to make this coordination and collaboration even more effective.

Finally, we wish to express again our commitment to the GEO objectives and the implementation of its GEOSS plan. We share a common goal and a vision that, we are confident, shall succeed in making GEOSS a reality for the benefit of humanity.

Thank you.