

ESA Statement at the GEO-X Plenary Meeting 15-16 January 2014, Geneva

Madam Chairman, distinguished guests,

It is a great pleasure to be here today as the representative of the European Space Agency.

Over the last ten years GEO has demonstrated, its capacity to deliver data and information addressing questions of great societal importance. I am very proud that ESA has been able to take an active role in a number of these initiatives and in the creation of the underlying infrastructure.

ESA has supported GEOSS activities since it began, both directly and through our partnership in CEOS. In addition to the general provision of satellite data, has particularly supported the following activities :-

The **Global Forest Observation Initiative** (GFOI), is one of the major successes and achievements of GEO. ESA leads the representation and coordination of all CEOS space agencies in this task, but has also been a major contributor of data in its own right. A critical factor in the success of GFOI has been the involvement of all parties in the REDD process, including the WB, UNFCCC Secretariat, IPCC Inventories Bureau, FAO and major national contributors. Its importance has been emphasised by major decisions recently taken at UNFCCC CoP in Warsaw in implementing REDD. This promises to lead to international financial agreements of order tens of billions of dollars, and which are entirely dependent on geospatial information for their implementation. This alone could justify the future of GEO. A further milestone has been the presentation to GEO-X of the Methods and Guidance Document which underpins this GFOI and which is very timely.

The same data team has also begun the necessary preparatory work for the acquisition and delivery of satellite data to the GEOGLAM initiative, in support of improved global agriculture.

In the context of **disaster management**, ESA contributes to GEO via its collaboration with the International Charter on Natural Disasters to guarantee Universal Access to the Charter to all GEO Members. ESA has also led the development of a CEOS WG on Disaster Management and provides data to the Supersites initiative, monitoring geophysical hazards worldwide.

The Climate change initiative of ESA, supporting the delivery of climate observations through the architecture of developed jointly by WMO, CGMS and CEOS, is also a major support of the climate aspects of GEO.

In addition, ESA actively contributes to the GEO initiatives such as the **Blue Planet** initiative and the **AfriGEOSS**, which includes the ESA TIGER activities on water.

All these programmes will be significantly enhanced, when the first Sentinel missions, developed by ESA for the EU Copernicus programme, start to come on stream in 2014. The Copernicus programme will change forever the paradigm for satellite data on all aspects of the environment and it is difficult to overestimate its potential to GEO.

With regards to infrastructure, ESA has devoted significant technical and financial resources to the development operations and upgrades of the **GEO Web Portal** and also to the management of the GCI operations and maintenance. ESA will continue its efforts in this area, conscious of the need for improvement, evolution and of the benefits that the GEO Portal offers to the GEO user community.

While continuing to support the excellent work in the areas set out above I believe that it is right now to consider the strategic direction GEO might take in the future. Through the experience of GEO to date we have learned how best GEO can fit into a wider landscape of agencies, services and initiatives with which it has worked in concert, very effectively, over the last decade. This may give us a clue as to where the focus of GEO might be in the future.

ESA believes that the most important of the many possible roles for GEO is to secure the basic data and observations which are needed to underpin information services for society. The first step in this is to understand, identify and to document clearly which precisely are those data and observations. It is important also to do this in a way that allows the delivery agencies easily to respond. This is a complex and demanding task. GEO can take benefit from the experience gained in the IGOS initiative, which adopted this approach for a number of topics in the past and which has been already integrated into the GEO framework. The work of GCOS in the area of climate also provides a valuable guide as to how this can be successfully achieved.

GEO also has to ensure that the observations, once secured, are available and accessible, both politically and physically.



Finally, I would like to express my sincere thanks to our Swiss colleagues and the GEO Secretariat for the excellent organisation of this GEO Plenary and I would like to wish you a successful and productive meeting.