

Speech by Mrs Lena Häll Eriksson, Head of the Swedish delegation to GEO and Director General of the Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute, on behalf of the Swedish Minister for the Environment, Andreas Carlgren, at the GEO Beijing Ministerial Summit, 5 November 2010

Chairman, Ministers, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Swedish Minister for the Environment may I express our sincere appreciation to the Government of China for hosting this very important and successful event.

Planet Earth is in trouble. Already humanity uses the equivalent of 1.4 planets to provide the resources we consume and to absorb our waste. The environmental, societal and economic challenges we are facing are huge, ranging from a rapidly increasing world population, industrial development, changing weather and climate patterns to globalization.

This year, we have seen an unprecedented sequence of extreme geophysical and weather-related events. Several regions of the world are still coping with the consequences of earthquakes, flash floods, widespread flooding, mudslides as well as heatwaves and drought, leaving many people in extreme distress. It is my sincere hope and ambition that knowledge, in terms of observations, data, information and know-how, will be shared within GEOSS in order to mitigate the effects of such catastrophes in the future.

Sweden is part of the Arctic region and we are therefore concerned about the threats and challenges presented by a rapidly changing Arctic environment. This northernmost part of the planet is a bellwether for what the effects of climate change might do to the rest of the world. I believe therefore that Arctic observation networks need extra attention and should be fully coordinated within GEOSS.

Actions are needed to respond jointly to the global and regional challenges through international cooperation and coordination. I'm convinced that Earth observation and Earth observation-based systems and services are integral parts of that response. Today's young people are well acquainted with modern information and communication technology and they are used to access relevant information in a timely and seamless fashion. I am convinced that the next generation of decision makers will take for granted that Earth observation data and services will be easily accessible in a harmonized and coordinated manner.

Sweden strongly believes in building a coordinated, comprehensive and sustained GEOSS. GEOSS will help us to enhance human health and safety, to protect the global environment, and to achieve food security and sustainable economic development. Thus, GEOSS is a strong and urgently needed catalyst on our way towards achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

Collaboration and commitment are the keys to realizing GEOSS. We need collaboration to ensure stable, reliable and long-term operations of our collective land, sea, cryosphere, atmosphere and space-based Earth observation networks and systems. We need collaboration to guarantee that our data and systems can be cross-linked and integrated, so they deliver an entity that exceeds the value of the sum of its individual components. And, collaboration helps us to establish a joint basis for sharing resources and infrastructure and for sharing knowledge, data and information.

Today, Sweden directly supports the work of GEO through a contribution to the GEO trust fund. At the international level, many of our contributions are channelled through existing European collaborations in the frameworks of ESA, EUMETSAT and ECMWF and through Europe's dedicated contribution to GEOSS, the Global Monitoring for Environment and Security Programme GMES.

At the national level, Swedish government agencies and other stakeholders cooperate actively on spatial data infrastructure, standards and interoperability in the framework of the Swedish Geodata-Strategy, in line with the requirements of the EU-directive INSPIRE and the GEOSS. Full and open access to data and information is crucial, and progress is being made. Under the sponsorship of the Swedish Research Council, Sweden is currently building a national clearinghouse for climate and environment data, and a similar activity is underway for biodiversity. The clearinghouse will represent an important asset for the national and international research community, and be a dedicated Swedish contribution to GEOSS.

Chairman, distinguished delegates,

Sweden is proud of being a member of GEO. We are impressed by the wealth of GEO-activities and results already achieved, and we will continue to support GEO in its important mission in building the GEOSS. Sweden applauds the Beijing Declaration as an important step forward on our joint path towards GEOSS.

Environmental, societal and economic challenges are tough, and GEO must and will play a vital role in finding and creating the solutions. Observe, share, inform: We have the pieces in our hands. It is our collective responsibility to put them together in a joint entity, and to truly realize the full potential of GEOSS within all GEO societal benefit areas.

Thank you.