

PRESS ADVISORY

International network of scientific organizations have launched first-ever global Biodiversity Observation Network

GEO BON will support decision-making by integrating data sets and monitoring systems on all aspects of biodiversity

Barcelona, Spain, 6 October 2008 – Some 80 leading scientific institutes, intergovernmental organizations and national ministries have joined forces to start building a global Biodiversity Observation Network for monitoring and assessing the world's species and ecosystems in order to prevent their further destruction.

The Earth's biosphere is such a complex system that a comprehensive monitoring network for simultaneously tracking individual species and populations and monitoring trends in forests and other ecosystems has never been built. With today's crisis of biodiversity loss, however, better information about the world's biological resources is urgently needed so that policymakers and managers can set priorities, elaborate strategies and assess the effectiveness of their actions.

To present a full picture of what is happening to biodiversity, the Group on Earth Observations Biodiversity Observation Network (GEO BON) will integrate biological information from a wide range of sources together with data and forecasts on climate change, pollution and other threats to biodiversity.

The collection and analysis of data on all aspects of the natural environment has been dramatically improved in recent years by technological advances. Increasingly sophisticated monitoring systems consisting of satellite, air, land and ocean-based instruments, as well as models and other decision-support tools, are being interlinked through the Group on Earth Observations to form a Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS).

Serving as the biodiversity arm of this expanding "system of systems", GEO BON will lead to a more complete understanding of the status and trends in the world's living resources. The national, regional and global organizations that are contributing to GEO BON will harmonize their data and information systems, identify and address gaps and overlaps in existing coverage, and ensure the continuity and sustainability of biodiversity information.

The importance of GEO BON was highlighted by the member governments of the Convention on Biological Diversity when they adopted a decision last May in Bonn calling on governments, organizations, scientists and other stakeholders to support this endeavor.

The GEO BON community is currently elaborating a detailed implementation plan. An advance document entitled "Implementation Overview: Early products and vision for building the network" will be presented to GEO's annual plenary meeting (GEO-V), to be held 19-20 November in Bucharest.

About GEO

The Group on Earth Observations was established in 2005 after the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), the Group of Eight leading industrialized countries (G8) and three ministerial Earth Observation Summits all called for improving existing observation systems. Its membership now includes 74 governments and the European Commission; 52 "participating organizations" also contribute to its work.

GEO is coordinating the construction of a Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS) that will link together diverse monitoring networks, instruments, data bases and models and other decision-support tools. GEOSS addresses nine priorities of critical importance to the future of the human race. It will help countries to protect themselves against natural and human-induced disasters, understand the environmental sources of health hazards, manage energy resources, respond to climate change and its impacts, safeguard freshwater resources, improve weather forecasts, manage ecosystems, promote sustainable agriculture, and conserve biodiversity.

GEO also serves as an advocate for investments in biodiversity and other Earth observation systems. Greater investment is essential to ensure the adoption of new and emerging technologies for monitoring species populations, modelling changes in biodiversity and filling in the many gaps in biodiversity observations.

Note to journalists: For more information, please see www.earthobservations.org/cop_bi_geobon.shtml or contact Michael Williams of the GEO Secretariat at +41-79-572-6480 (cell phone in Barcelona from 6 – 10 October) or +41-22-730-8293 (in Geneva before and after the meeting).