

## Summary Report

### 21<sup>st</sup> Executive Committee Meeting

Geneva, 22-23 March 2011

(As accepted at the 22<sup>nd</sup> Executive Committee meeting)

#### 1 GENERAL BUSINESS

##### 1.1 Adoption of Agenda (Document 1)

The meeting was chaired by Ms Sherburne Abbott, the GEO Co-Chair from the United States. She opened the meeting by expressing her condolences to the representatives of Japan for the recent earthquake and tsunami. She welcomed the new Committee members from Niger and Germany and thanked the representative of the Co-Chair of China for the excellent organization of last November's Ministerial Summit and GEO-VII Plenary. She then invited all of the meeting participants to take turns introducing themselves to the group.

The Chair asked if the participants could adopt the agenda. Italy asked for including a discussion of how GEO should respond to the recent tsunami; it was agreed to address this under Other Business. The Secretariat Director said that items 11 and 12 on the private sector and the post-2015 period, respectively, would require a good amount of attention; these items were moved ahead of item 8 on Committee Reports. The agenda was adopted as amended.

##### 1.2 Summary Report of the 20<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee Meeting (Document 2 – for acceptance)

China, which had chaired the 20<sup>th</sup> meeting, thanked the Secretariat for the document and provided one small correction. The Report was then accepted.

##### 1.3 Review of Actions from Previous Meetings (Document 3 – for information)

The Secretariat Director introduced the document. He observed that very few actions were still open and virtually all could now be closed. Action 13.7 on encouraging Members and Participating Organizations to populate the GEOSS Common Infrastructure addresses an ongoing effort and is the only action that needs to remain open. Regarding Action 19.1, he confirmed that the Eye on Earth Summit has been rescheduled for December and that the Secretariat will continue to engage with the Summit organizers; South Africa stressed the importance of keeping track of this event. Action 19.11 on a GEO gap analysis would be addressed during the current meeting. Action 20.1 on the delegation of authority for staff matters has been addressed, although travel procedures remain onerous.

Brazil apologized for the delay in producing Document 14 on the Executive Committee's Post-2015 Working Group. Australia noted that since the document was not a product of the working group Action 20.2 has not yet been fully addressed; it was agreed to close the action on the understanding that a replacement action would be created during the meeting.

## 2 SECRETARIAT OPERATIONS AND TRUST FUND

### 2.1 Secretariat Operations Report (Document 4 – for information)

The Secretariat Director presented the document. He described the Secretariat's work on developing the next Work Plan, initiating activities for the Global Forest Observation Initiative, and supporting the Supersites' response to the recent disasters in Japan. Several seconded experts will be departing over the coming few months, and discussions about replacements are ongoing with China, the European Space Agency (ESA), Japan, Italy and the United States. In addition, USAID is expected to fund an expert to work on the Call for Proposals and Australia to provide support for the forest activities. There is a declining trend in secondments and therefore several experts are being financed from the Trust Fund. The Director expressed concern that the trend towards funding specific activities could lead to declining support for the Secretariat's general day-to-day activities.

Other highlighted activities included GEO News, the updated website, IT support to Task management, the IPCC-GEOSS workshop, preparations for GEOSS in the Americas, disaster meetings with Caribbean countries, the response of the GEO Biodiversity Observation Network (GEO BON) to a decision of the Convention on Biological Diversity, GEO outreach to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, and coordination with the European Commission on the outcomes of the calls from the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme.

The Chair applauded the impressive amount of work carried out, including for the development of Version 0 of the new Work Plan; it would be important to examine the match between staff resources and the requirements of this new Plan. Italy looked forward to receiving the report of the IPCC-GEOSS workshop and hoped to be able to continue supporting a seconded expert next year. South Africa appreciated the work being done on the Call for Proposals but wondered what level of donor interest could be expected. He also noted that South Africa will chair COP 17 of the Climate Change Convention in December and expressed his willingness to explore how to engage GEO in this conference, including through the emerging partnership with the IPCC. The European Commission said it may be able to support some parts of the Call for Proposals via the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme, but it first needs access to the proposals. Germany asked what the role of GEO would be vis-à-vis the IPCC. Japan, commenting on the need to postpone the recent Asia-Pacific Symposium scheduled in Tokyo, presented the options under study, including one whereby India may host this year's event. He also noted the success of the recent African Water Cycle Symposium and thanked the Secretariat for its support. Brazil expressed his concern about the process for the Call for Proposals and the likelihood that most proposals would not be funded.

The Secretariat Director thanked South Africa for the offer regarding the UNFCCC conference. He explained that the IPCC-GEOSS workshop report was undergoing a final review and would be available shortly.

Australia suggested that as Members see that they are getting more out of GEO they may naturally become more directive about how their resources are used. The Chair observed that there may be four possible approaches to future staffing: secondments, increased contributions to the Trust Fund to finance staff, a virtual team, and making better use of Secretariat alumni. The Director agreed with Australia that the growth in national activities was a sign of success for GEO but that such activities should not be implemented at the cost of ensuring an effective international secretariat; he confirmed that a core team of 20, even when supplemented by strong links to alumni and national experts, was the minimum necessary staffing.

The Chair proposed that the requirements of the Work Plan be the starting point for determining how many staff members are needed and thus what the level of funding is required. Brazil asked for more information from the Secretariat on how the profiles of the experts match the various job descriptions; he proposed that defined posts be advertised in the future. China is working on sending a new secondment to the Secretariat; he noted that increasing contributions to GEO may require placing more focus on a narrower set of deliverables. Japan, supported by the Secretariat Director, recognized

that while it might be the ideal to have defined posts, the reality was that GEO needed to be flexible and to accept seconded experts and build the best possible match between the available resources and the needs of Secretariat operations.

The Chair concluded that the Executive Committee should encourage GEO Members to second more experts to the Secretariat and where possible to match these experts with the Secretariat's particular needs. Italy noted that many national experts supplement the work of the Secretariat, for example by supporting the UIC/CBC Call for Proposals by reviewing proposals. In response to a question from Italy, the Director confirmed that the Secretariat is engaging with the European Environment Agency on the issue of promoting in-situ observations. He also agreed that while indeed there are many people outside the Secretariat providing support, a strong Secretariat was still important.

**Action 21.1 – South Africa, with support from Secretariat, to explore how to engage GEO in the next Conference of the Parties to the Climate Change Convention**

**Action 21.2 – Secretariat to draft a letter for the Co-Chairs, on behalf of the Committee, to urge Members to second experts and contribute to the Trust Fund**

## **2.2 Draft Financial Report for 2010 (Document 5 – for information)**

The Secretariat Director introduced the document. He said that the audit has not yet taken place so there may still be changes in the final financial statements. The contributions for 2010 totalled CHF 3.7 million, which marked an increase over recent years and brought them back to 2006 levels. Expenditures were limited to CHF 3.2 million in order to cope with CHF 500,000 of liabilities which were revealed during the transition to the IPSAS accounting system. As a result, the opening balance for 2011 was CHF 2.2 million, identical to the year before and still slightly above the working capital needs of CHF 2 million. So far, for 2011, only CHF 2.1 million in contributions have been recorded. The Director recalled that a minimum level of CHF 3.5 million in cash contributions is needed to operate the GEO Secretariat.

The European Commission expressed its gratitude to the Secretariat for its continued efforts to manage the budget and balance the accounts. The EC confirmed that it had already transferred its contribution for 2011 of €600,000. In addition, the EC will look to continue providing funds for developing country travel and other indirect support during 2011. Australia stated that the full accrual accounting now required for the GEO accounts was a positive step and noted the need to be careful about one-off contributions that can make the Trust Fund appear healthier than it really is. China noted its in-kind contribution of USD 450,000 related to the 2010 Ministerial and Plenary. Germany confirmed that it will contribute €100,000 in 2011. The Director said that the additional funding provided by the United States in 2010 resulted in an exceptional year and that the projections for 2011 were therefore lower. Brazil confirmed that it will make a cash contribution for 2011. South Africa will increase its contribution to ZAR 1.9 million, of which ZAR 400,000 will be earmarked for additional initiatives in Africa.

## **2.3 Draft Communication Plan (Document 6 – for information)**

Mr Michael Williams of the Secretariat presented the document. Australia cited the need for better access to PowerPoint presentations on GEO; these will be made available via the FTP site and can also be found via Google. South Africa recommended including success stories in the GEO messaging, being more precise about target groups, especially in developing countries, and exploring how to measure the impact of the communications efforts. Japan recommended reaching out to researchers and to the general public; she offered to take the lead in engaging famous science museums as a way of reaching out to the general public.

Germany emphasized the need to address politicians, to collaborate more with United Nations organizations, and to consider Facebook and Twitter. The European Commission welcomed the document and noted that the Rules of Procedure call for such a communication strategy to be included in the GEO Work Plan. The EC also asked that great care be exercised when addressing the "Key

Messages" of the proposed Communications Plan: "GEOSS provides decision-support services for addressing today's priority policy issues". The EC stressed that GEO must avoid giving the impression that it is entering in to the political domain. .

Italy supported the points of Germany and South Africa and expressed concern that many Members, particularly developing countries, do not participate in GEO Plenary meetings.

Brazil applauded the Secretariat's efforts and stressed that GEO has a data provision problem, not a communications problem. He shared the EC's concern about "decision-support services", noted that the lack of good Internet access made it difficult for many developing countries to engage in GEO, cited the open-source movement as a possible model for GEO, observed that such trends are normally set by the most advanced countries, and recommended an engagement plan via Facebook. Mr Williams confirmed that a GEO Facebook page does exist.

Japan said that regional workshops on specific issues are useful for engaging developing countries and that appropriate agencies and donor institutions should be invited to GEO meetings. GEO should approach social and political scientists who not yet engaged in GEOSS activities through symposia, conferences and workshops. Science museums could serve as an effective communications tool for reaching out to the general public.

### **3 2009-2011 WORK PLAN PROGRESS REPORT (DOCUMENT 7 – FOR ACCEPTANCE)**

The report was presented by Ms Alexia Massacand of the Secretariat. The report summarized the progress that the GEO community had made on GEOSS implementation since GEO-VII Task by Task. Some 2,500 components are now registered in the GCI, although many are not easy to access.

Brazil thanked the Secretariat and said that it was not necessary to wait for the GEO Portal to be ready before disseminating all of this information. He argued that even when the Portal is fully operational a text-based system will be more user friendly for many people and invited the Executive Committee to support the Secretariat in establishing such a parallel system.

Germany expressed reservations about the report, saying that the connection between Tasks and Targets was unclear and that the report was too positive. A new kind of progress report should be developed for the 2012-2015 period that includes milestones and an executive summary.

South Africa had initially agreed with Germany's concerns but now believes that they are addressed by the emerging 2012-2015 Work Plan. Japan recommended introducing success stories and achievements and offered a minor correction to the text.

Brazil said that unless GEO's information is more easily available via the web, and not just through the Portal, it will be impossible to reach out to a broader community. All of the achievements in the Progress Report should be featured on the GEO website so that more people will see the extent of GEO's work. His views were supported by other Committee members.

Italy recognized that there is an issue of communications vs. the availability of GEO information and asked whether the website is indeed the right tool to use. The European Commission agreed and expressed concern that a website could cause duplication and impose a large work burden on the Secretariat.

Brazil described his proposal as being a very simple approach to providing a brief descriptive text with a link to the systems and components contributed to GEOSS. He said that the Google search engine would find everything on the GEO website but not in the GEOSS Common Infrastructure (GCI) registries. Australia agreed with this approach. Japan thought it could work if the number of entries remained limited.

The Secretariat Director welcomed the idea and noted that it would involve an important transformation of the website, which GEO had originally agreed should be only for GEO management and public outreach. Putting GEOSS content on the web site, however, did not threaten to duplicate

the GCI, which will eventually be much more powerful, and it could prove useful in the meantime. The EC agreed that this would not constitute implementation if it were a temporary measure until the Portal is fully functional. China stressed that GEOSS, as a system of systems, must present a coherent face to the world.

Brazil said that the recent Architecture and Data Committee (ADC) meeting recognized that the design of GEOSS had been conceived earlier in the decade before the ubiquity of the text searching model that has been introduced by Google and others. He reiterated the importance of making GEOSS more visible on the web and of making GEO the “Wikipedia of Earth observation”. While this approach will not solve the problem of visibility it can make a useful contribution.

Italy agreed that this approach could improve visibility and thus contribute to more political support; there are no technical barriers to implementing it and the work can therefore go forward.

**Action 21.3 – Secretariat to establish web pages featuring descriptions of and links to GEOSS resources that are highlighted in the Work Plan progress reports.**

#### **4 REPORT OF THE DATA SHARING TASK FORCE (DOCUMENT 8 – FOR INFORMATION)**

Mr Alan Edwards, Co-Chair of the Data Sharing Task Force (DSTF), presented the document. He explained that GEO-VII had requested the Task Force to continue operating through 2011 and provide recommendations to GEO-VIII. The Task Force has been focusing on implementation of the GEOSS Data CORE and on legal liability, licensing, user registration, and other related issues. The aim of the DSTF is to have the Beta version of the Data CORE ready around mid-year so that it can be formally launched and demonstrated at GEO-VIII. He stressed that the work of implementing the GEOSS Data-CORE would also involve major actions being undertaken by other parties, in particular the GCI component providers, together with the GCI Coordination Team, the Architecture Implementation Pilot task and the Architecture and Data Committee. The Task Force asked that the Executive Committee endorse its roadmap and implementation framework.

Brazil said that there is no need to put a disclaimer on the web site as the creative commons license addresses the issue of legal liability. He expressed concern that too much would be demanded from contributors to the CORE and they will be scared off by burdensome requirements. GEO in any case has no legal liability. He also expressed concern about the proposal of the Task Force to include a non-commercial category.

South Africa asked for further explanation about the activities proposed for the implementation framework and how they are linked to the Task Force mandate. He expressed concern about all the legal issues that had been highlighted and that seemed to be outside of the GEO spirit. He noted that the compromise reached at GEO-VII on the Data CORE may have introduced additional issues that will now have to be addressed.

Niger emphasized that issues of access to data were particularly critical for developing countries. He observed that data mechanisms have been set up recently in the Sahel and Sahara regions which dealt successfully with the legal issues.

Germany said that the roadmap seemed appropriate but what might be missing was monitoring of the data-sharing activities. Simplifying the data categories seemed appropriate but further work was needed in defining the categories more carefully.

Italy said the Task Force should not go beyond what was endorsed by the Plenary but that any task force was welcome to present suggestions. Therefore, suggestions from the DSTF were welcome, although final decisions on this delicate issue belong to the GEO Plenary.

The Secretariat Director said that there was a risk of imposing too many requirements on data providers and that the Data CORE could drift away from the original philosophy.

Mr Edwards explained that while the Plenary had instructed the Task Force to continue its work for one further year, it had not provided detailed guidance beyond the requirement that the Task Force was to make recommendations to the GEO-VIII Plenary. The Task Force is committed to keeping things simple. The Plenary called for user registration, and the Task Force believed that a simple, one-time registration process could be developed. Attribution was a more complicated and longer term issue, and metadata issues still need to be fully addressed. The GCI needs to be more than Google and to ensure some level of quality and discipline. The Task Force decided to introduce the non-commercial category to start learning about categories and the development of a possible framework that would allow the registration of all data in GEOSS, a requirement that has been stressed by a number of GEO Members at past Plenary meetings.

The Chair proposed that the Committee provide feedback to the Task Force on its proposed framework and roadmap.

The Director expressed concern that, while headed in the right direction, the work would not result in a populated Data CORE in time for GEO-VIII. Mr Edwards said that the CORE could be operational in time for the Plenary following a Beta launch in mid-year.

Brazil reiterated his concern that undue burdens would be placed on data providers and that users should not have to register twice, once to enter GEOSS, and then again when they reach the end data providers. The European Commission and Italy expressed support for the credibility of the Task Force, and Italy said that GEO can not simply be a doorway to data and that registration was therefore essential.

The Chair said that the discussion may be too complex to handle within an Executive Committee meeting and that the Task Force may be a better venue. South Africa noted that expectations varied because the terms of reference for the work of the Task Force in 2011 were not clear; he also said that registration procedures are clearly needed for both users and providers but they must be simple. The Chair tasked Alan Edwards and Gilberto Camara with reviewing the Beijing decisions relating to the Task Force and returning the next day with a compromise text.

On the following day Messrs Edwards and Camara presented the meeting with “Proposed terms of reference for the Data Sharing Task Force” containing brackets. Mr Camara believed that the Task Force should focus solely on the priority task of generating a list of providers and data sets that would be contributed to the Data CORE. Mr Edwards believed that the remit of the Task Force should go further and include studying licensing, legal liability and other issues and making recommendations that the Plenary could then accept or reject. The Chair confirmed that in Beijing the interest of the United States in extending the mandate of the Task Force through 2011 had been motivated by the licensing issue, which requires careful study.

Following an extensive debate, including a small-group discussion over lunch, the meeting agreed that the Task Force should focus primarily on the Data CORE but that it can also address the broader data issues. The Task Force will report back on its progress to the Executive Committee at its July meeting.

**Action 21.4 – Data Sharing Task Force to report on its progress to next meeting of the Executive Committee**

## **5 FOREST CARBON TRACKING AND THE GLOBAL FOREST OBSERVATION INITIATIVE (DOCUMENT 9 – FOR INFORMATION)**

The Secretariat Director presented the document. Niger observed that while Africa has many forested states even the non-forested countries of the Sahel and elsewhere would have an interest in this GEO effort. The Director confirmed that such countries are welcome to join the Forest Carbon Tracking Task. Brazil and Japan stated their countries’ strong interest in the Global Forest Observation Initiative and in joining the Task Force. Italy, too, stressed his interest in these activities and was exploring the assignment of experts to the task force and the planning team.

## **6 PRESENTATION OF VERSION 0 OF THE 2012-2015 WORK PLAN (DOCUMENT 10 – FOR ACCEPTANCE)**

Ms Alexia Massacand of the Secretariat presented the document. She described the history of the Work Plan process, the consultations that had been conducted within the GEO community and the effort to tie the Work Plan more closely to the 10-year strategic targets. Four main changes were emphasized: (i) a “Target to Task” top-down approach; (ii) a three-part structure; (iii) a reduced number of Tasks; and (iv) an improved Task management. The next steps for developing Version 1 of the 2012-2015 Work Plan were described, including the revision of proposed Tasks and deliverables, the reorganization of ongoing 2009-2011 Work Plan Tasks under the new Work Plan structure and the integration of new proposals from the GEO community.

The Chair, speaking on behalf of the United States, said that the US had intensively reviewed the document and concluded that its mix of revolutionary and evolutionary change could be beneficial. The United States supported the framework, which bridges the divide between the visionary language of the strategic targets and the practicalities of implementation, and was in favour of moving cautiously in this direction.

Japan appreciated the new approach and proposed several small modifications. South Africa agreed that developing the Work Plan around achieving the targets was in line with the recommendations in Beijing. He believed it would support better monitoring of the progress towards the targets but questioned whether the proposed management structure might be too resource intensive. Australia also supported the more transparent link to the targets and the structure of the Plan, which should improve reporting. She suggested that the further development of the Work Plan be coordinated with the Monitoring & Evaluation Working Group to ensure that the same evaluation criteria are used and she agreed with South Africa that the management structure needed to be considered carefully.

The European Commission reported that a recent meeting of the European caucus revealed a number of concerns. Some current contributors were unable to tell where their activities fit in the new structure, and there was a major concern that the explicit link with the Societal Benefit Areas (SBAs) was being broken. Another concern dealt with the use of the term “Information Services” in Part 3. It was the view of the EC that this section should be labelled “Information Products”. The responsibility for the provision of services lies with GEO Members, and GEO should avoid implying any engagement with the policy and political domains. Finally, the EC strongly supported the creation of Management Boards with small memberships for each SBA. The proposed management structure of a single SBA Management Board with 45 members raised serious concerns.

Brazil thanked the Secretariat and agreed with the views of the United States. The new approach would improve the management and organization of GEOSS. The links between the committees and the Societal Benefit Areas would become less complicated. The phrase “information services” was not a problem for him but alternative wording, perhaps involving “systems”, could also reflect the deliverables in part 3.

Russia said that the use of “information services” in part 3 was too general and another title should be found. Users will need to be able to find the proper information about each SBA, and the SBAs should play an essential role in the GEO structure.

Italy remarked that while GEO provides important support to decision makers, it should not pretend that it provides the full solution; a phrase such as “services to support decision making” might be more appropriate. A better explanation of how the new plan is derived from the current one would be helpful. In response to a question about why the gap analysis was included only in the infrastructure section, Ms Massacand explained that it could have been included just as well under institutions.

Germany remarked that the reduction in the number of Tasks was indeed necessary and that the progress reports for this new plan should be improved.

The United States suggested that more nuanced language would be helpful here and there; for example, “top-down approach” could be replaced by “target-driven approach”, “reduced” by

“streamlined”, “management boards” by “implementation boards”, etc. A section on the impediments to implementation of the current plan could also be useful.

Ms Massacand noted that the Monitoring & Evaluation Working Group has been working for the past year on indicators and will present them at the next Work Plan Symposium. To ensure a smooth transition from the current plan, the Secretariat experts will engage Task leads in producing Version 1 of the new Work Plan. The approach to future progress reports will be shaped in the context of the monitoring & evaluation discussions.

The Director said that most of the remarks in today’s discussion will be addressed further in the Work Plan Symposium. He recognized the importance of ensuring that current contributors do not get lost in the transition, and he highlighted some of the difficulties of the current committee structure. Finding the right balance between volunteerism and effective oversight remains a challenge.

The Chair agreed that the Symposium would address some of the points raised. Italy, as the current chair of the Committee on Earth Observation Satellites, confirmed CEOS support for the proposed structure of three new Management Boards. The meeting recognized that the discussion of the new Work Plan had just begun and the process would continue until the GEO-VIII Plenary.

## **7 STATUS OF PROCESS FOR APPOINTING THE SECRETARIAT DIRECTOR FOR THE 2012-2014 PERIOD**

The Secretariat staff excused themselves as the Committee discussed this item *in camera*.

## **8 2011 GEOSS MONITORING & EVALUATION (DOCUMENT 11 – FOR INFORMATION)**

Mr Giovanni Rum of the Secretariat presented the document. He recalled that the terms of reference for the 2011 yearly evaluation had been approved by GEO-VII. Based on this the evaluation team is taking a detailed look at the data and architecture targets and expects to present the final evaluation report to the Executive Committee in July. Meanwhile the Working Group continues to address the issue of performance indicators.

The Chair stated that the Committee should be pleased with the progress being made and she looked forward to the presentation of the report in July.

## **9 REPORT OF GEO COMMITTEES (DOCUMENT 12 – FOR INFORMATION)**

Noting that it was the turn of the Capacity Building Committee (CBC) to present the report, Mr João Soares of the Secretariat stated that he had been asked to make the presentation on behalf of the CBC co-chairs, who were unable to be present in Geneva.

Germany expressed concern that the work of the committees seemed disconnected from the work of the Executive Committee. The Secretariat Director said that the committees are working under their mandate of overseeing the Work Plan rather than on the corporate and managerial issues that were the responsibility of the Executive Committee; at the same time, because there is a disconnect between the structure of the Work Plan and that of the committees, some of the committees have become involved in implementation. The new Work Plan and management structure should help to resolve this.

Italy suggested that the Executive Committee encourage the committees to coordinate better amongst themselves, particularly as concerns the GEOSS Common Infrastructure. The Chair agreed, and the Director suggested that the Committees also be encouraged to become involved in developing the new Work Plan and management structure.

## **10 REPORT OF THE GAP ANALYSIS STRATEGY TEAM (DOCUMENT 13 – FOR ACCEPTANCE)**

Mr Stuart Minchin, co-chair of the Gap Analysis Strategy Team, presented the document via telephone. He said that, while building on the gap analyses conducted by CEOS and GCOS, GEO was in a unique position to conduct gap analysis across all nine SBAs. The Team plans to provide more detail to the Committee in July with the goal of acceptance by the Plenary in November. He requested the Committee to note the Team's progress in drafting the initial outline of the gap analysis process and to request the Team to develop a detailed methodology and resourcing plans.

The Director said he appreciated the structural gap analysis for identifying consistencies across the various GEOSS activities, which would help to ensure a cross-cutting and unified GEOSS.

Brazil said that CEOS has already conducted a great deal of work in analyzing gaps in the space component of GEOSS. He suggested that CEOS could provide GEO with information about the space data that is being planned and will become available in 8-10 years.

Germany emphasized the importance of collaboration with relevant institutions such as GCOS, IPCC and WMO.

The Chair recommended that the Committee take note of the progress achieved and request the Team to continue developing its methodology and plans. The Team should provide an interim report to the Committee in July before presenting its report to the Plenary in November.

## **11 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S POST-2015 WORKING GROUP (DOCUMENT 14 – FOR INFORMATION)**

The Chair confirmed that the text on the table was not an official GEO document but was, rather, a position paper by Brazil. Brazil presented the paper. Japan then provided its own position paper on a process for developing a post-2015 strategy for GEO.

Commenting on the Brazil paper, Russia said that one of the most important targets for GEO was to provide a global metadata resource about Earth observation systems. He disagreed with the proposition that organizations such as ECMWF provided a relevant model for the post-2015 GEO. He also noted the difficulty for Russia of contributing to the current GEO Trust Fund due to the lack of any formal and signed agreement.

Australia welcomed Japan's proposal for a more expansive process and stressed the need to look forward to what GEOSS can achieve in the future.

China stressed the importance of making the GEOSS architecture truly sustainable beyond the year 2015 and further advancing cooperation and coordination.

The Chair recalled that the outcome of this process would be the presentation of a report to ministers in late 2013. The Executive Committee would first need to develop a framework for this process that could be agreed by the GEO-VIII Plenary. As a next step, therefore, she proposed that the Secretariat organize the work of the Committee's post-2015 Working Group – which is open to representatives of all Executive Committee members – immediately before the next Executive Committee meeting. The Working Group would need to hold a series of teleconference or meetings in advance of that event. The Working Group should take the Brazilian and Japanese papers, the minutes of the current discussion and any other inputs and produce a draft framework document setting out options and issues for review by the July meeting of the Executive Committee. The European Commission noted that the process should be designed to enable the European caucus to discuss the issue well in advance of the July meeting.

Japan noted the importance of considering the relationship between GEOSS and high-level international processes and agreements, such as those for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and sustainable development. He highlighted the Rio+20 Summit that will be held in 2012 and the

regional caucus meetings that will take place from September through November 2011. As GEO had its origins in Earth Summit statements, it could be useful to make the link between GEO and the next Summit. Brazil, as the host country for Rio+20, invited guidance on what he should try to do to ensure a useful role for GEO in the event.

Australia, China, Germany, Italy, South Africa and others expressed their interest in participating in the Working Group.

In closing the discussion, the Chair asked the Working Group to ensure that the draft framework document is presented to the next meeting of the Executive Committee in due time.

**Action 21.5 – Brazil to explore how GEO could engage with the Rio+20 Summit**

**Action 21.6 – Secretariat to invite participants to join the Post-2015 Working Group, organize preparatory teleconferences for preparing a new document for distribution to the Executive Committee 15 calendar days in advance of its 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting, and organize a meeting of the Working Group on 11 July**

## **12 ENGAGING THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN GEOSS (DOCUMENT 15 – FOR INFORMATION)**

The Chair noted that the document had been tabled at an earlier Committee meeting but there had not been enough time for discussion. Mr Peter Colohan of the United States then presented the paper, which discussed activities for engaging the private sector and the issue of private contributions to the Trust Fund and to specific activities.

Australia said it was important that contributions for specific purposes, such as the Norwegian support for the Forest Carbon Tracking Task, not be allowed to mask the true level of general-purpose funds available in the Trust Fund. Transparency was also essential to ensure that there is no appearance of undue influence by the private sector.

Germany asked whether there were already examples of private companies wanting to contribute to the Trust Fund. The Chair said that foundations are considered to be private sector and that one US foundation has expressed interest.

The European Commission agreed with Australia that transparency was vital and that targeted funds should be so labelled to clearly distinguish them from general funds; this could possibly be achieved through the mechanism already defined within the GEO Rules of Procedure in Annex A, paragraph 5, which refers to "funds deposited for specific purposes, hereafter referred to as deposits".

The Chair noted that the issue of Trust Fund management should be dealt with separately from that of private-sector engagement. The Secretariat Director expressed concern that clearly earmarking targeted contributions would risk advertising this possibility and could lead to reduced general funding. Together with the European Commission he agreed that the Trust Fund and private-sector engagement were separate issues.

Russia said there can be conflicts between the interests of the public and private sectors and that the role of GEO Members in engaging the private sector needed to be clarified. The Chair said that this issue was addressed in the text.

Brazil said if the section on possible private-sector contributions to the Trust Fund was removed from the document and dealt with separately under a Trust Fund agenda item, the Executive Committee would still need to draw up rules and procedures to guide the Secretariat. The Director proposed new text to address this concern until the detailed rules are drafted by working group of the Committee.

The Chair summarized the discussion by concluding that a new Executive Committee working group would be established under the Committee's guidance to draft rules for eventual acceptance by the Plenary. In the meantime the Secretariat could negotiate private-sector contributions under the Committee's guidance and subject to its final review.

**Action 21.7 – Secretariat to modify document 15 based on the Committee discussion so that it can be annexed to the Rules of Procedure****13 UPDATE ON PREPARATIONS FOR GEO-VIII**

The Secretariat Director presented the item and said that Turkey has confirmed that the GEO-VIII Plenary will be held on 16-17 November and the 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the Executive Committee will be held on 15 November. The venue will be the Istanbul Conference Centre. The Secretariat will distribute invitations next week and conduct a site visit in May. The European Commission confirmed that it would support Turkey's efforts.

**14 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Italy stated that the recent disaster in Japan highlighted GEO's responsibility to address the issue of tsunamis despite problems with the earlier tsunami task force. He offered to submit a proposal on tsunamis to the next meeting of the Committee. Australia suggested that this issue could be considered in the context of the new Work Plan. Japan responded that it would provide inputs regarding the tsunami that devastated northeast Japan as soon as the country had recovered from the current confused situation, and China expressed its interest in collaborating. The Secretariat Director said the issue could also be addressed at the Work Plan Symposium.

The Chair invited her fellow GEO Co-Chairs to make their final remarks. The representative of the Co-Chair from China said that this had been his first Executive Committee meeting and that he had been impressed with how the Committee functions. The Co-Chair from the European Commission said it had been an important meeting for evaluating GEO's problems and applauded Japan for their participation despite the recent tragedy. The Co-Chair from South Africa was impressed with the progress on the Work Plan and noted that his earlier scepticism about the gap analysis had been allayed by the presentation, which revealed that the analysis will be highly targeted. The Chair, speaking as the GEO Co-Chair from the United States, expressed her appreciation for the high level of congeniality that exists within the Committee.

The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be held in Geneva on 12-13 July. The meeting was adjourned at 15:55.

**Action 21.8 – Italy to submit a document on a proposed GEO approach to tsunamis to the next meeting of the Executive Committee.**