

Chairman, Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the UK Minister of the Environment, may I offer our sincere appreciation to our South African colleagues for hosting what is a very successful event.

GEO epitomises the changing world mood with its focus on environment and climate.

Accounting for environmental issues in our daily lives is, in our view, the most important societal change of our time.

Many people would say that GEO is ahead of the game – and it needs to stay that way.

It is a testament to the efforts of scientists world-wide that society is now taking serious action on climate change. As the UK Secretary of State for the Environment recently stated when talking about climate change: ‘The science is no longer in doubt’.

The IPCC 4th Assessment Report, in particular, is a tour de force of scientific evidence, much of which already depends upon the observational systems we are addressing here at GEO. This dependency will increase as the need to feed models, understand impacts and address the societal benefit areas increases. It is our task in GEO, to make sure these observations are defined and made.

In the UK, action on climate change has many forms, including the ground-breaking Climate Change Bill that commits to statutory targets to reduce from our 1990 carbon dioxide emissions by at least 60% by 2050.

These targets are challenging and serious. We are asking our people to fundamentally change the way they live as a society everyone has to *'Recycle more, be more energy efficient, manage their carbon footprint'*.

The term 'carbon footprint' itself was unheard of just a short while ago but now there can be few souls in the world that are unaware of it.

Looking forward, we all need to appreciate the gravity of the change in attitude and thinking that is now occurring, particularly among young people.

So what does this mean for the global observation community and the aspirations for GEO?

***First*, we must continue to develop our understanding of the changing planet and monitor the most critical and sensitive components of the Earth system. We must not be complacent, the job is not done. There is much more we need to understand, model and predict.**

***Second*, we face a challenge to provide the operational observing system necessary to underpin our policy aspirations. Observations provide the basic building blocks to underpin evidence-based policymaking in life you either observe or run blind. GEO has the role to ensure we collectively observe the climate and environment and are not, therefore, working in the dark.**

***Third*, we must remember that we, as governments, serve the people and that we have a duty to inform and help our citizens to understand the nature and scale of global change. And only then can we expect people to change their behaviour.**

In addressing these Global challenges, there is no room for complacency - as the recent tragic

events in Asia have reminded us. We need closer convergence within and between governments - lives and livelihoods of many depend on it.

So, in conclusion, the UK Government applauds the role of GEO and supports, in full, the Cape Town Declaration. It is not a simple task to define the size and shape of the evolving System of Systems that is GEOSS. But it remains a key challenge that we must, collectively, continue to address head-on and the UK looks forward to playing an active part in delivering the goals of GEO over the coming years.