

United States- Remarks to the GEO 2010 Ministerial – November 5, 2010

David J. Hayes - Deputy Secretary of the Interior

As Delivered

Morning Welcome

Good morning ministers, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of the United States, it is my great pleasure to join you here today, and I join my colleagues in thanking Minister WAN, GEO Co-Chair Zheng, the GEO Secretariat Director Jose Achache, and the outstanding team of people who have organized these proceedings, including the excellent dinner we had last night.

I am David J. Hayes, and I serve in President Barack Obama's administration as the Deputy Secretary of the Interior. The U.S. Department of Interior is responsible for over 200 million hectares of land – or one-fifth of the lands of the entire United States. We manage national parks like Yellowstone and Yosemite, wildlife like the grizzly bear and the buffalo, and the oil, gas, and renewable energy resources on our lands and of our coasts. We also uphold the United States' responsibilities to Indian nations.

To carry out our mission as stewards of the natural resources of the United States, the Department of the Interior relies on ever-improving information about our planet. Data from our Landsat satellites, stream gages, seismic observations, and field work across the continent are essential to our decisions about everything from how we restore ecosystems and protect biodiversity to how we confront pollution, climate change and growing pressures on our water and energy resources.

Our commitment to developing and sharing information about our planet is shared by the full sweep of U.S. government agencies responsible for the Earth science and environmental management. Eight federal agencies, along with representatives of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, are with me here today as a demonstration of our commitment to GEO and to Earth observations.

This commitment extends to the highest levels of our government, indeed, to President Obama himself, and it is my pleasure to send his personal greetings:

"I send greetings to all those gathered for the 2010 Beijing Ministerial Summit of the Group on Earth Observations (GEO). My Administration is committed to confronting the global environmental challenges of our time, including climate change and food security. Earth observations are essential to helping the international community understand and address these and other shared concerns. Through the ongoing efforts of the Global Earth Observation System of Systems, GEO is working to ensure open access to data and information to enable science-based decision making and increased international cooperation on science and technology. These efforts are helping to lay the foundation for a brighter future for all nations. As you come together on this special occasion, I thank you for your hard work and dedication. I wish you all the best for a productive event."

BARACK OBAMA

Closing National Statement

Good afternoon ministers, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentleman. I thank you for the opportunity to address you again today on behalf the United States government, our leaders and scientists, and on behalf of the people we serve.

The foundation of sustainable human prosperity rests on three interacting systems: 1) economy; 2) society; and 3) the environment.

Our economy and our society are inextricably linked to the environment. And we see clearly that economic advance does not have to come at the expense of the environment. Recognizing this point offers our best hope for achieving the Millennium Development Goals so eloquently articulated 10 years ago.

Understanding our economy, our society, and our environment as an interconnected “system of systems” is the great inheritance of modern science and technology. As a result of such thinking, human knowledge today greatly exceeds that of even five years ago, as has our capacity to absorb and process information. And we can imagine an even brighter future for ourselves, given the leaps in science and technology we anticipate will come in just a few years time.

However, all assembled here today know that these advances in human knowledge are not universally shared.

We should be clear and honest with one another about this point. We must, therefore, accelerate the pace of cooperation in science and technology, the sharing of human knowledge, and the building of capacity among developing countries to benefit from, and add to, that body of knowledge.

President Obama shares this view and firmly believes that international cooperation in science and technology is fundamental to global peace and prosperity. “*Science, technology, and innovation,*” President Obama recently said, “*proceed more rapidly and more cost-effectively when insights, costs, and risks are shared.*”

This statement rings particularly true for me when I think of the extraordinary opportunity that is presented to us at the mid-point of our 10-year effort to build the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS). When realized, GEOSS will result in unprecedented global access to environmental information, integrated into new data products for the benefit of societies and economies worldwide.

No one nation, of course, can bear the cost of building GEOSS alone. Even if we share the costs and risks, we will not succeed if we do not share our insights. For the Earth observation community, this means sharing our data.

I am extremely proud that the GEO community can stand together here today and endorse the GEO Data Sharing Action Plan. This remarkable step builds on the GEOSS Data Sharing Principles agreed in Brussels in 2005, and the GEO Data Sharing Guidelines agreed in Washington in 2009. Together, these agreements on data sharing form the anchoring point for achieving the vision of GEOSS.

We are also pleased to endorse the concept of the GEOSS Data CORE, which underlines our commitment to full and open data sharing. The United States holds a great number of data sets that fall in this category, and I will give you a short list, just a sample, of what we plan to include in the CORE:

- The Department of Energy's Carbon Dioxide Information Analysis Center (CDIAC), providing full and open access to quality-assured carbon cycle data for climate change research;
- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's AIRNow Web site, providing the public with easy access to local, regional, and national air quality information;
- The standard Earth science products created by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), chosen to create consistent long-time-series data records utilizing multiple instruments.
- The many open data sets managed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, including data from Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS), the International Comprehensive Ocean-Atmosphere Data Set (ICOADS), and the Argo system, a global array of 3,000 free-drifting profiling floats that measures the temperature, salinity and velocity of the upper ocean;
- The Foreign Agriculture Service (FAS) Crop Explorer interface, which exposes current global weather and imagery, as well as crop and soil moisture model results online;
- The Global Seismographic Network (GSN), a permanent network of state-of-the-art seismic and geophysical sensor stations distributed over all seven continents and over 80 countries;
- Data from the Smithsonian GEO's network of tropical forest institutes;
- And the Landsat Global Land Survey 2010 (GLS2010), managed by the Department of the Interior's United States Geological Survey. It is a new global land data set used to provide coverage of islands and coral reefs.

This list is, again, only a small sample of the data the United States will contribute to the GEOSS Data CORE, and we invite other nations to designate as many full and open data sets as possible to be included in this CORE.

In addition to these advances in data sharing, we believe that GEO must do even more, in specific application areas, to realize the full value and benefit of integrated Earth observations.

At last year's GEO-VI Plenary in Washington, DC, the United States made a recommendation that GEO pursue two or three major advances in Earth system monitoring by 2015. At the same time, we also identified land imaging and characterization as an area where we could succeed in the short-term, and we are pleased to announce two new initiatives in this domain.

The first is a new Global Landcover Data Initiative, building on GEO's existing task in this area, to produce global 30-meter-resolution land cover data products designed to address international information needs for land use and land use change. The first set of products will describe the Earth's land cover conditions as of 2010, and will include 1) a product providing estimates of six major land-cover characteristics as of 2010, and 2) a global map of land-cover type as of 2010, using the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization classification system. Once the baselines are established in approximately two to three years, it is envisioned that the land-cover characteristics product will be updated annually and the land-cover-type map every five years.

To accomplish this, the critical need is for 30-meter resolution land cover data. Eighty (80) percent of this imagery can be obtained with Landsat, while 20 percent is needed from international partners. We invite the whole GEO community join us in helping to make these critically necessary products a reality, and to work with us to ensure their effective deployment and use for the benefit of decision makers worldwide.

The second initiative, as a U.S. contribution to the GEO Forest Carbon Tracking task and the Global Forest Observation Initiative, we are pleased to announce the SilvaCarbon program. Through SilvaCarbon, the United States will partner with developing countries to demonstrate how to build forest and terrestrial carbon monitoring systems so that they meet existing and emerging international standards, while providing information useful for improved natural resource management and economic growth. SilvaCarbon is also a flagship program within the United States' fast-start financing for forest mitigation announced by President Obama in Copenhagen at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2009.

We see these new initiatives as part of a renewed, vigorous engagement in the systems-approach to Earth system monitoring that GEOSS represents. This type of approach is essential to informing forward-looking and sustainable decisions for our society, our environment, and the economy that will be required of future decision makers.

We are proud to be part of the foundation-building exercise that is GEOSS, and we look forward with excitement to continuing this important work. I am confident that our efforts will bear great fruit, and will be seen by future generations as a critical part of this remarkable age, in which we crafted the information tools for sustainable human prosperity.

Thank you for your attention.