

PRESS RELEASE

Earth Observations for Global Health: GEO welcomes World Health Organization participation

Geneva – 11 July, 2016 - The Group on Earth Observations announces a new partnership to strengthen use of technology to improve global health through an agreement with the World Health Organization. The announcement was made during the GEO 37th Executive Committee Meeting held in Geneva on 6 – 7 July.

Eight new organizations joined GEO: Association of Geospatial Industries (AGI), African Regional Centre for Space Science and Technology Education-English (ARCSSTEE), Arab States Research and Education Network (ASREN), Global Flood Partnership (GFP), Humanitarian Open Street Map (HOT), Integrated Carbon Observation System (ICOS), World Ocean Council (WOC) and World Health Organization (WHO).

Public health is a key area where Earth observations can help address global challenges such as those identified in the Sustainable Development Goals, under Goal 3, Good Health and Well-being. GEO promotes use of applications to visualize data in order to make improved decisions to attain the Agenda 2030 aim to *leave no one behind*.

"WHO sees participation in GEO as a positive step towards use of Earth observations for improved decision making on Public health" says Dr. Ed Kelley, director of Service Delivery and Safety Department at WHO, who will serve as the representative of WHO to GEO."

"The use of geospatial data is critical to advancing disease detection and containment efforts. Being part of GEO would allow WHO secretariat and its member states to benefit from the space-based technologies" says, Dr. Ramesh Krishnamurthy, Senior Advisor, who serves as the alternate representative of WHO to GEO.

GEO's China Chair Dr Liao Xiaohan, Deputy Director General, Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research, Chinese Academy of Sciences, stated, "Public health is central to development and we must improve our efforts to harness Earth observations technologies to visualize the accessibility of health centers, to monitor air quality and to track pollutant and disease outbreaks."

All GEO activities are underscored by the need for a coordinated response to climate change, and the carbon observation activities of ICOS, another new Participating Organization confirmed today, is designed to help countries report as required under the Paris Agreement of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The Global Flood Partnership uses Earth observations to prepare for and mitigate flood damage and the Humanitarian Open Street Map helps relief workers pinpoint disaster sites, both tools contributing to agreements under the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

In addition to Liao, the GEO Executive Committee Co-Chairs include Dr Robert-Jan Smits, Director-General of DG Research and Innovation (European Commission); Dr Philemon Mjwara, Director-General, Department of Science and Technology (South Africa) and Dr Kathryn Sullivan, Administrator of the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

GEO is a partnership of governments and organizations that envisions “a future wherein decisions and actions for the benefit of humankind are informed by coordinated, comprehensive and sustained Earth observations”. GEO Member governments include 102 nations and the European Commission, and 103 Participating Organizations comprised of international bodies with a mandate in Earth observations.

Together, the GEO community is creating a Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS) that will link Earth observation resources world-wide across multiple Societal Benefit Areas - Biodiversity and Ecosystem Sustainability, Disaster Resilience, Energy and Mineral Resources Management, Food Security, Infrastructure & Transportation Management, Public Health Surveillance, Sustainable Urban Development and Water Resources Management - and make those resources available for informed decision-making.

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