
**United Nations Inter-Agency Meeting on
Outer Space Activities**

Twenty-ninth session

Vienna, 4-6 March 2009

Agenda Item 7

Participation in the process of the Group on Earth Observations.

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At its twenty-eight session in 2008, the Meeting identified the reinforcement of “the contributions made by United Nations entities to the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS) of the Group on Earth Observations (GEO) and making optimal use of the System’s benefits to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations” as one of the key issues for inter-agency coordination (A/AC.105/909, para. 14(d)).

At that session the Inter-Agency Meeting “requested the Office for Outer Space Affairs, as the secretariat of the Meeting, to approach WMO with a view to clarifying the terms of reference and the procedure for becoming a member of the Inter-agency Coordination and Planning Committee (ICPC) and to inform the members of the Inter-Agency Meeting.”.

Annex I contains information on the origin of the ICPC, as well as the ICPC Terms of Reference, as provided by WMO.

Annex II and Annex III contain - for information - the statements made by WMO on behalf of the ICPC and by the Office for Outer Space Affairs at the Fifth Plenary Session of the Group on Earth Observations, held in Bucharest, Romania, from 19-20 November 2008.

Participants will be invited to discuss further action by the Inter-Agency Meeting on this agenda item, including ways to increase coordination of actions carried out by entities of the United Nations system within the context of GEO.

Annex I

Interagency Coordination and Planning Committee for Earth Observations¹

I. Background

The Inter-agency Coordination and Planning Committee for Earth Observations (ICPC) has been established in 2005 by FAO, ICSU, IOC, UNEP, UNESCO and WMO, as a permanent interagency collaboration mechanism to address their respective mandates in the operation of their co-sponsored observing systems: GCOS, GOOS and GTOS. The ICPC was thus replacing and strengthening the collaboration initially achieved since 1995 by the former “G3OS Sponsors Group”. Establishing the ICPC was felt appropriate in the light of the increased importance placed on observing systems within the UN system, and in order to efficiently interface with the Group on Earth Observations and its Global Earth Observation System of Systems.

II. Purpose, Membership, Chair term and Terms of Reference

Purpose - As sponsors of the global observing systems, to provide strategic guidance and to support efforts for increased visibility and in the implementation of their mandates.

Membership - Agency Focal Points (FAO, UNESCO –including its IOC–, UNEP, and WMO, for Earth Observations, designated by Executive Heads, and a representative from ICSU.

Chair and term - Identify one Agency Focal Point as Chair for a one-year period.

Terms of Reference

- Identify areas of the GEOSS 10-Year Implementation Plan requiring Interagency coordination and collaboration;
- Organize and set the work program and timetable for *ad hoc* Interagency GEOSS/GEO Task Teams as required. Arrange for participation of other appropriate bodies as appropriate (e.g., ICSU, CEOS and IGOS Themes);
- Prepare joint interagency inputs to GEO meetings and GEOSS committees and panels as appropriate (e.g. Joint Statements);
- Review and consult on individual Agency input to GEO meetings and sub-group activities;
- Serve as an interface for interagency activities with the GEO Secretariat and provide coordinated interagency input to GEOSS activities;
- Track Agency activities as they are related to GEO/GEOSS implementation;
- Review the structure and function of existing interagency coordination bodies as they relate to GEO/GEOSS planning and implementation and coordinate on changes that would foster and improve the contribution of the UN System Earth observation programs to GEOSS;
- Prepare periodic reports for consideration at the Consultation of Agency Executive Heads on GEO/GEOSS matters on interagency coordination and collaboration activities as required. The periodic reports should identify issues and recommend solutions or options for decision

¹ The name « Interagency Coordination and Planning Committee for Earth Observations » was proposed by the first meeting instead of « Interagency Coordination and Planning Committee for GEO/GEOSS », subject to confirmation by the Executive Heads of partner agencies.

Annex II

WMO comments on the GEO 2009-2011 Work Plan Version 3 Extract related to Task CL-09-02: Sustained Observing Systems

These comments reiterate the intervention made by WMO, on behalf of the United Nations' Agencies co-sponsoring global observing systems, at the GEO-V:
Fifth Plenary Session of the Group on Earth Observations
Bucharest, Romania, 19 -20 November 2008

The United Nations' Agencies co-sponsor several of the global observing systems which contribute to and indeed underpin much of GEOSS : the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS); the Global Terrestrial Observing System (GTOS); the Global Climate Observing System (GCOS), and the WMO Global Observing System (GOS). In Version 2 of the 2009-2011 Work Plan these global observing systems were placed in an over-arching and transverse area of the Work Plan under Task AR-09-03, "Advocating for Sustained Observing Systems". The task was to "establish actions for the maintenance and expansion of the GEOSS-underpinning observing systems including the terrestrial, oceanic, air-borne and space-based observing systems, and promote stable, reliable, and long -term operations of Earth observation networks within a framework of national policies and international obligations." We believe that placing these global systems in the Transverse area was a good decision and that the associated over-arching Task was a good description of how the GEO community could support these Systems.

In Version 3 of the Work Plan, these over-arching Global Observing Systems have been moved from the Transverse area supporting all SBAs to Task CL-09-02 under the Climate SBA. Whereas these systems do support the Climate SBA, they also support most if not all of the other SBAs. After consultation with the co-sponsoring UN Agencies and ICSU as well as GCOS, and on their collective behalf, WMO requests that Task AR-09-03 be reinstated and include the co-sponsored global observing systems.

Annex III

**Statement by the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs
to the GEO-V: Fifth Plenary Session of the Group on Earth Observations
Bucharest, Romania, 19 -20 November 2008**

Distinguished Delegates,

We are pleased to report to the Fifth Plenary Session of the Group on Earth Observations (GEO-V) the activities of the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (OOSA) that contribute to the implementation of the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS).

The Office for Outer Space Affairs is the United Nations entity responsible for promoting international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space. It serves as the Secretariat for the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) and for the United Nations Inter-Agency Meeting on Outer Space Activities that convenes annually to discuss the coordination of space-related activities in the United Nations system. The Office is also implementing the United Nations Programme on Space Applications to enhance the use of space science and technology and their applications, in particular in developing countries. The activities of the Programme bring together experts to discuss and act on issues that are also of high relevance to GEOSS. A cornerstone in these capacity building efforts is the network of Regional Centres for Space Science and Technology Education, affiliated to the United Nations, located in Brazil and Mexico, India, Morocco, and Nigeria. The Regional Centres contribute, on a regular basis, to Capacity Building efforts pursued by GEO.

In implementing the recommendations of the Third United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNISPACE III), held in 1999, the Office acts as Executive Secretariat of the International Committee on Global Navigation Satellite Systems (ICG). ICG was established on a voluntary basis as an informal body to promote cooperation related to civil satellite-based positioning, navigation, timing, and value-added services, as well as to facilitate cooperation on the compatibility and interoperability of global navigation satellite systems – particularly through the Providers Forum of ICG - and to promote the use of global navigation satellite systems to support sustainable development, particularly in developing countries. To date, nine States Members, the European Community, and 15 organizations (United Nations entities, intergovernmental, and nongovernmental organizations) are contributing to the deliberations of ICG.

The Office also implements, as recommended by UNISPACE III, the United Nations Platform for Space-based Information for Disaster Management and Emergency Response, known as UN-SPIDER. UN-SPIDER will ensure that all countries and international and regional organisations are able to access and use all types of space-based information and solutions to support the full disaster management cycle. Through UN-SPIDER, the Office acted as co-chair of GEO task force DI-06-09 and CB-07-02, organising jointly in 2008 three international and regional meetings (in Geneva and in Davos, Switzerland, and in Santa Maria, Brazil) and helping GEO become a Cooperating Body of the International Charter Space and Major Disasters. The United Nations, through the Office, is the single largest user of the Charter. The Office is offering to work with GEO to make operational the access of GEO Members to the Charter by using the same 24/7 set-up the Office already has in place for the United Nations system and also by building upon the UN-SPIDER network to support GEO Member activations. The UN-SPIDER network includes Regional Support Offices (currently being implemented in Algeria, in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and in Nigeria) and nominated National Focal Points.

From 4 to 7 November 2009, the Office co-hosted and co-organized the 9th Meeting of the United Nations Geographical Information Working Group (UNGIWG) in Vienna, Austria. The Office, together with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa will be co-chairing for the next two years the United Nations Geographic Information Working Group.

In this context the Inter-Agency Meeting on Outer Space Activities, the primary body for coordination of space-related activities in the United Nations system, at its 28th session held in February 2008, noted that the United Nations Spatial Data Infrastructure (UNSDI) had been recognized in the declaration approved by ministers at the GEO Ministerial Summit in Cape Town, South Africa. That declaration noted that UNSDI provided an additional avenue for collaboration between United Nations entities and GEO (A/AC.105/909, para.37). At the same session, the Inter-Agency Meeting also finalized the 32nd annual report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the coordination of space-related activities within the United Nations System (A/AC.105/910). The report was subsequently approved by the Office of the Secretary-General and notes that one of the key issues of coordination during the biennium 2008-2009 will be to reinforce the contributions made by United Nations entities to GEOSS and to optimize the use of the benefits of GEOSS with a view to strengthening the capacity of the United Nations.

Distinguished Delegates,

The Office also takes this opportunity to report on the discussions relevant to GEO at this year's sessions of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and its Scientific and Technical Subcommittee. In its deliberations the Committee noted with appreciation that Member States were implementing the recommendations of UNISPACE III by, among other things, actively supporting and participating in the work related to the 10-Year Implementation Plan of GEOSS (A/63/20, para. 52).

The Committee also noted with satisfaction the presentation made by the Secretariat of GEO, at the forty-fifth session of its Scientific and Technical Subcommittee at the invitation of the General Assembly in its resolution 62/217, on the progress made in the implementation of the 10-Year Implementation Plan of GEOSS (A/63/20, para. 109). Under its agenda item "International cooperation in promoting the use of space-derived geospatial data for sustainable development" the Committee took note of the significant potential of GEONETCast to enhance access to a wide range of information and reach users in developing countries (A/63/20, para. 273).

General Assembly Resolution 62/217 (para. 16) states that the Director of the Group on Earth Observations should be invited to report on a regular basis to the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee on progress made in the implementation of the 10-Year implementation plan for GEOSS. The Office hopes that the Director of the GEO Secretariat will accept this invitation to deliver such a report at the forthcoming session of the Subcommittee to be held in Vienna from 9 to 20 February 2009.

The Office for Outer Space Affairs will continue to pay close attention to the many fruitful synergies that could result from close cooperation between GEO and entities of the United Nations system. Consequently OOSA will continue to contribute, through its mandated activities, to a range of tasks in the GEO Workplan 2009-2011. We look forward to continuing the excellent cooperation with the GEO Secretariat.

Thank you for your attention.