



United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs

The Inter-Agency Secretariat on the Procurement of Earth Observation Imagery within the UN System (IPEO)

Context and Objectives:

Earth Observation (EO) imagery is fundamental to the operations of the UN and to support Member States, and is vital for tracking socio-economic development; tackling climate change and facilitating disaster management efforts; sustaining global food systems; monitoring conflicts and peacekeeping, supporting census mapping and town planning; and ensuring adequate healthcare at national and subnational levels. A lack of coordination among UN entities has resulted in a disjointed procurement model. This proposal aims to eliminate duplications and enhance inter-agency UN coordination in the procurement of Very-High Resolution (VHR) commercial Earth Observation Imagery across the UN system, leading to potential significant savings (estimated up to \$20-30M at a minimum annually) for the United Nations System and also for the Member States supported.

Each year, more than 20 UN entities collectively spend more than \$8 million (estimated based on input received from some eight surveyed entities only to date) on acquiring Earth Observation satellite images. Such organisations include: the Department of Peace Operations, OCHA, OHCHR, UNDP, UNEP, WFP, FAO, CTBTO, IAEA, UNHCR, UNFPA etc. Through an initial three-year action plan, this project, proposed to be implemented in partnership with OICT (UN Global Service Centre) and in cooperation with the UN Procurement Division, would seek to address the Secretary-General's and the Space 2030 Agenda's call for greater coordination across the UN system.

To address this challenge, the proposed solution is to leverage the collective bargaining power of the United Nations by establishing one centralised global procurement hub and an Inter-Agency Secretariat for the procurement of VHR Earth Observation imagery. The UN would aim to negotiate and implement a single multi-user licensing model with each private or public provider it works with, enabling also some degree of sharing with target developing countries, lowering their cost of acquisition as well in certain situations such as for humanitarian response, disaster risk reduction and crisis management.

In its resolution 78/72 of 2023, the United Nations General Assembly *urges* the Inter-Agency Meeting on Outer Space Activities (UN-Space), under the leadership of UNOOSA, to *increase their collaboration, including through UN-Space, with a view to better coordinating their data-sharing, building United Nations system capacity and cooperating on the procurement of space-based information, to accelerate the application of space assets in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, and to participate, as appropriate, in UN-Space coordination efforts.*

Deliverables and Outcomes of the Project

Outcome 1: Achieve significant cost savings and enhanced efficiency of fund allocations by reducing duplications through joint procurement and pooled funds, including the acquisition of multi-use licenses.

- Utilise UNOOSA's existing convening roles within the UN system (UN-SPACE, UN Geospatial Network) and with external partners (CEOS, GEO) as well as with private sector to identify cost savings and promote volume discount purchasing of Earth Observation imagery by negotiating and acquiring multi-use licenses for very high-resolution Earth Observation imagery.
- Mobilise resources for a pooled fund from participating UN entities for the acquisition of multi-use licenses for Earth Observation imagery, gradually replacing the donor-provided funding.
- Leverage UNOOSA's attendance at global and regional workshops and meetings and organizing dedicated meetings or consultations to continuously identify partners within the private sector and from governments, to develop and sign MoUs or cost-sharing agreements.

Outcome 2: Increase accessibility to VHR Earth Observation imagery and the broader space data market for both UN entities and Member States, particularly for developing countries.

- Establish a central platform and necessary IT infrastructure in collaboration with OICT/UNGSC and building on previous development work done for Peacekeeping Operations, to develop the required capacity for the ongoing tasking, procurement and storage of very high-resolution (VHR) Earth Observation imagery for most UN programmes, and to support Member States.

The platform will allow data search and use of application tools for multi-temporal imagery for mapping, analysis, or operational activities, whether humanitarian, development, investigations, or peace and security related. The platform will also support the Action for Peacekeeping+ (A4P+) as well as the United Nations Geospatial Strategy Goals and the Secretary General's Data Strategy in the context of 'One UN'.

- Test the platform functionality by piloting the joint procurement of EO data on a smaller scale at first, across multiple UN entities within a single region for the benefit of active UN programmes and beneficiary countries and address, inter alia, census mapping, disaster management, peacekeeping, health, crop monitoring, monitoring population dynamics and migration flows, and climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- Conduct an awareness-raising campaign showcasing the platform and the applications of space data, the various available services and technology for the benefit of the Sustainable Development Goals and of UN system-wide priorities.

Outcome 3: Enhance synergies and overall structure for improved coordination regarding the procurement of Earth Observation imagery.

- Develop and implement an action plan, agreed upon by Heads of Entities, to coordinate UN efforts to procure and use VHR Earth Observation imagery.
- Establish a small Secretariat of one P3, one P2 and one G6 staff members under the auspices of UN-SPIDER to host a high-levels principals meeting with relevant UN entities and implement the action plan.
- Host annual meetings with relevant UN entities to track progress against the action plan.

Project Timelines

2025:

- Utilise UNOOSA's existing convening roles within the UN system to map current uses of space data, procurement of imagery and identify potential find cost savings.
- Launch event for the mapping process

2026

- Convene industry and EO providers to identify partnership opportunities and coordinate discount purchasing of Earth Observation imagery by acquiring multi-use licenses for high-resolution VHR Earth Observation imagery.
- Establish a centralised global procurement hub to act as a central platform for very high-resolution Earth Observation imagery and collaborate with relevant UN entities to expand the platform to support capacity building and access to very high-resolution Earth Observation imagery for support to Member States.

2027:

- Promote and encourage shared and volume discount purchasing of Earth Observation imagery by acquiring multi-use licenses for high-resolution Earth Observation imagery and making data broadly available.
- Draft and sign MoUs or cost-sharing agreements between EOPS, the private sector, and UN entities.
- Mobilise resources for a pooled fund by leveraging UNOOSA attendance at international fora, such as the IAC, COPUOS, World Space Forum, World Space Business Week, Esri UC, UNGGIM, GEO Symposia etc.
- Launch IPEO at COPUOS 2027

Project Budget

The estimated budget for the project over three years is approximately USD 1,985,000 per year over three years. This budget includes:

- **Personnel Costs:** Approximately USD 470,000 for a project team per year, including programme manager and administrative staff.
- **Non-Personnel Cost (toolkit development):** Around USD 1,000,000 per year for toolkit development, translation, and outreach materials.
- **Implementation of activities (participant travel, venue costs and other peripherals):** An estimated USD 50,000 per year for travel, organizing expert events and capacity-building activities, and travel for participants from UNOOSA and developing countries.
- **UN Programme Support Costs (13%):** Approximately USD 228,000 per year.