GROUP ON
EARTH OBSERVATIONS

From the Group on Earth Observations (GEO)
Statement to Fourth Session
Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction
Geneva, 22 May 2013

Mr/Mme Chair, Your Excellencies, Delegates, Colleagues,

Loss of life and property due to disasters is increasing globally. The figures provided yearly by UNISDR and other relevant global disaster risk reduction programmes, and the increasing number of activations of the International Charter on Space and Major Disasters, bear witness to this trend.

In this context, Earth observations and information, derived both from space and from *in-situ* networks, have demonstrated their maturity and critical role in supporting national and local first responders and risk managers by providing effective tools to rapidly map damages and impacts during rescue operations.

The Group on Earth observations (GEO) through its 150 partners is working to expand the use of satellite imagery and maps for managing the risks posed by fires, floods, earthquakes and other hazards; the International Charter on Space and Major Disasters plays a major role in this effort. In the specific case of geohazards, GEO is supporting risk modelling through the implementation of the Global Earthquake Model initiative (GEM), while it is helping the scientific community to better understand the causes and dynamics of geological threats through the GEO Geohazard Supersites and Natural Laboratories initiative.

Furthermore, GEO is promoting real-time data-sharing and standardized procedures, terminologies, communications and evacuation practices needed for supporting tsunami hazard assessments. GEO is also supporting key global and national players in developing a globally-coordinated warning system for wildland fires to improve prediction and emergency response at the local, national and regional levels. The GEO Community is developing decision-support tools and applications for the full cycle of natural-disaster management, particularly for developing countries.

Space agencies of the Committee on Earth Observation Satellites (CEOS) -the space coordination arm of GEO- have created an ad hoc Disaster Working Group to help improve disaster risk management (DRM) on a global basis, for all phases of disaster management. CEOS is now preparing a DRM Observation Strategy and three coordinated pilots in the areas of floods, volcanoes and seismic hazards. In addition, still under the umbrella of GEO, CEOS is conducting regional demonstrations of a multi-hazard, end-to-end approach to disaster management, focusing on the Caribbean and Africa.

Within the Global Drought Information System (GDIS), coordinated through GEO, global drought forecasting is being developed in conjunction with monthly and seasonal forecasts from the European Centre for Medium-range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF) and the US National Center for Environmental

Prediction/Climate Prediction Center (NCEP/CPC). The infrastructure for the deployment of a drought portal is being provided by the US National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS) and the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The current portal design is set up to support full global monitoring at multiple scales -continental, regional or local-. The portal design contains both “high bandwidth” and “low bandwidth” drought mapping tools for countries with low internet connectivity.

Mr/Mme Chair, I look forward to the continued fruitful interaction between the Global Platform and GEO and to discussing with other participants here how Earth observations and information can support your work.

Thank you.

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