GROUP ON
EARTH OBSERVATIONS

GEO statement to Third Session
Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction
Geneva, 8-13 May 2011

Mr/Mme Chair, Your Excellencies, delegates, colleagues,

Thank you for this opportunity to inform you about how the Group on Earth Observations, or GEO, is contributing to the objectives of the Global Platform and the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.

For those of you who are not yet familiar with us, GEO consists of 86 member governments, the European Commission and 61 Participating Organizations. These partners collaborate through GEO to interlink their environmental monitoring systems, coordinate their observation strategies and investments, and share their environmental data, information and know-how. Based on this cooperation, the GEO community is generating information products and services that decision makers can use to confront global challenges, from addressing natural disasters and health epidemics to reducing biodiversity loss and carbon emissions.

The critical importance of Earth observations for monitoring and forecasting natural disasters cannot be overemphasized. Rapid access to satellite images, weather forecasts, seismographic data, maps of transport links and hospitals, and socio-economic information can strengthen disaster preparedness as well as prediction and response. Our growing ability to integrate satellite data with ground observations and to share disaster-related data and information across borders, for example through the impressive efforts of the International Charter on Space and Natural Disasters, are also supporting disaster-risk reduction.

Mr/Mme Chair, the governments and organizations that contribute to GEO are providing a growing range of information systems for addressing disaster risks. A number of these systems, such as the Global Early Warning System for Wildland Fire, Sentinel Asia and the SERVIR satellite monitoring systems, have made remarkable progress over the past two years.

I would like to highlight in particular the advances and contributions made by GEO's Geohazards Supersites. The Supersites provide rapid Internet access to multi-satellite data for major disasters, most recently for the earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan in March. The first GPS-measured ground displacement field produced by Japan's Geospatial Information Authority was available on the Supersite web portal the day of the earthquake, providing the global community with its first real insight into the severity and type of the earthquake. Radar images from the European, Japanese and Germany space agencies were also rapidly distributed, making it possible for scientists to assess the causes of the earthquake as well as future risks. If taken into account by decision makers, these data and the research findings they make possible can lead to better disaster preparedness and ultimately help to mitigate disasters.

GEO Secretariat: 7 bis, avenue de la Paix • Case postale 2300 • CH-1211 Geneva 2 • Switzerland
Tel: +41 (0) 22 730 85 80 • Fax: +41 (0) 22 730 85 20 • secretariat@geosec.org • www.earthobservations.org

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 can support their work. Thank you.