

Statement by the Group on Earth Observations (GEO) to the First Session of the Preparatory Committee of the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, 14-15 July 2014 Geneva, Switzerland

Co-Chairs, special Representative of the UN Secretary General, Your Excellences, Delegates and Colleagues,

The Earth's atmosphere, oceans and landscapes are being increasingly impacted by human activities: the changes are more and more evident, with climate change playing a forcing function in areas such as water management, food security, energy supply and disaster risk reduction. Observing and modeling these changes is critical to enabling governments and society to make informed decisions about global challenges facing humanity.

The critical role of environmental monitoring was fully acknowledged by the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, which reaffirmed that environmental protection, economic development and social development are the three interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars of Sustainable Development. The Conference also acknowledged GEO's efforts in providing access to coordinated Earth observation data and information to address Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

GEO is very pleased that an increasing number of delegations have recognized the essential role of satellite and in situ Earth observations, related information and services, in informing disaster preparedness and prevention policies, decisions and actions, thus providing a unique contribution to enhancing the resilience of communities exposed to hazards and improving their response to extreme events.

Achieving sustainable development requires an integrated and crosscutting approach, which has been GEO's working principle since its inception in 2005. The interim results of the UN Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals activities clearly point in this direction; the SDGs under definition will most likely constitute the overarching framework for the post-2015 global agenda.

We are certain that the new Hyogo Framework for Action will constitute one of the key strategies to implement the SDGs.

Co-Chairs

The Group on Earth Observations (GEO) is a voluntary 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 and information." GEO Member governments include 90 nations and the European Commission, and 77 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, including agriculture, biodiversity, climate, disasters, ecosystems, energy, health, water and weather, and make those resources available for informed decision-making.

This established framework and worldwide network of expertise is starting to prove its capability in delivering results at different geographical scales, from global to national, making it fully consistent with the current approach for post-2015 SDGs consolidation. GEOSS provides users, through a dedicated GEOSS Portal, access to more than seventy million resources of Earth observations data, information, tools and models. In addition, global initiatives are being developed to increase the impact of Earth observation data and information on societal decision making in several areas, including housing and urban development, agriculture, biodiversity, forests, oceans, and global carbon. For Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in particular, the GEO partnership is developing decision-support tools and applications for the full cycle of disaster management, particularly for developing countries. The Committee on Earth Observation Satellites (CEOS), the space coordination arm of GEO, is playing a key role in coordinating the contributions to DRR from space agencies worldwide.

Co-Chairs, distinguished delegates,

I would like to conclude my statement by underlining two key messages I think should be reflected in the preparations and, more importantly, in the outcome of the WCDRR in Sendai.

Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation frameworks and strategies should include Earth Observations as an enabling component, and should ensure timely access to resources, such as the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), which provide decision makers and citizens the data and information necessary to make informed decisions about preparing for, preventing, responding to and recovering from natural and human-induced disasters.

Following its mandate and making available its established framework, networks and assets, the Group on Earth Observations is prepared to be a key partner in consolidating the new Hyogo Framework for Action and in supporting its implementation; this is fully in line with the directions from the GEO Ministerial Summit, held in Geneva in January 2014, where the GEO mandate was renewed for a second decade, through 2025. The Ministerial Declaration specifically directed GEO to take into full account the post-2015 Agenda and SDG process in the on going development of its new Implementation Plan.

I look forward to the continued, fruitful interaction between UNISDR and GEO and to discussing with other participants how Earth observations and information can support your work.

Thank you.