



UN-GGIM: Arab States Convenes Inaugural Meeting in Riyadh

The next phase of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) regional architecture was successfully implemented in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on 24 and 25 February 2015, when the UN-GGIM: Arab States Regional Committee for Arab States was convened. Organised by the UN-GGIM Secretariat in partnership with the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the two-day event attracted 32 senior delegations from 11 countries (Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates), and the Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab Countries of the Gulf (GCC-Stat).

Participants were welcomed by HE Morayyea Hassan Al Shahrani, president of the General Commission of Survey (GCS) and chairman of the National Committee of GIS, Saudi Arabia, who emphasised that the government and the people of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia were proud to host the regional event. He

also expressed his pleasure to see many Arab-country representatives travelling to Riyadh and sharing their experiences in the important emerging field of geospatial information. The meeting was opened by Dr Amor Laaribi from the UN-GGIM Secretariat, who stated that the establishment of the

fourth UN-GGIM regional entity was most welcomed and in line with UN-GGIM's global mandate to promote cooperation and dialogue among countries, and regional and international organisations.

GEOSPATIAL INFORMATION BASE

Dr Vanessa Lawrence CB, co-chair of UN-GGIM, chaired the meeting and gave a comprehensive overview of UN-GGIM and its importance globally, noting: "We all know that in order to tackle some of the greatest challenges we face as a society today – eradicating poverty; combating disasters and climate change; enhancing economic development, especially in transitional and developing countries; promoting sustainable patterns of consumption and production; and protecting and managing the natural resource base of countries – we need to understand more about our location and place. Fundamental to this is increasing our understanding in order to make the important decisions on how to address these issues. Therefore, solid, reliable and accurate information is needed to make such evidence-based decisions. A reliable and accurate geospatial information base is at the heart of this, and this Committee is driving the work



▲ The participants of the UN-GGIM: Arab States meeting.



▲ Arab States Bureau and the UN-GGIM Secretariat.

to ensure that such an information base is developed and available right across the globe."

The first order of business for the meeting was to elect the inaugural UN-GGIM: Arab States Bureau, determining Saudi Arabia as

the use of geospatial information, particularly its integration with statistical information, for evidence-based decision-making. However, it was noted that there were still some challenges, including those related to institutional arrangements, new technologies,

meeting the chair-elect, HE Al-Shahrani, observed that country participants were pleased with the interactive discussions and the proposed set of recommendations to improve geospatial information development in their region. All expressed their satisfaction with the outcomes of the meeting with the election of the Bureau and the establishment of four Working Groups with highly relevant topics upon which to build a substantive work plan. The participants thanked the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for its hospitality and for its commitment to carry out the UN-GGIM: Arab States Committee's secretariat work. The participants also warmly thanked the UN-GGIM Secretariat for continuing to assist the Arab Member States in building and implementing their Regional Committee. ◀

SAUDIA ARABIA WAS DETERMINED AS CHAIR AND ALGERIA AND JORDAN AS VICE-CHAIRS

chair and Algeria and Jordan as vice-chairs to lead its Executive Bureau for the next few years. Saudi Arabia has additionally accepted the proposal to assure the Secretariat of the Regional Committee. Sufficient time was then dedicated to the discussions about the work programme and the subsequent establishment of Working Groups.

SPECIFIC RELEVANCE

Participants agreed that the geospatial information issues to be addressed by the Regional Committee should be considered in line with the major issues identified by UN-GGIM through global consultation, but with specific relevance to the countries in the region. Countries, represented by a wide spectrum of national experiences in geospatial as well as statistical activities, were able to enrich the discussions and learn from the experiences of others. They showed their keen interest in the building of national geospatial information infrastructures and

national capacities and meeting the needs of emerging geospatial data users.

Following productive debate and discussions, it was decided that four Working Groups would be established with countries electing themselves to join at least one of the initial Working Groups with the agreement that others may choose to join later. The Working Groups are: (i) Institutional Arrangements, Legal and Policy Issues, Awareness and Capacity Building; (ii) Fundamental Data and Geo-Standards; (iii) Geodetic Reference Frame; and (iv) Integration of Geospatial and Statistical Information. The leaders of the Working Groups will be nominated at the next meeting of the UN-GGIM: Arab States Committee and Working Groups, to be held in Algiers, Algeria, from 10-11 June 2015. A further meeting of UN GGIM: Arab States is scheduled in New York, USA, during the 5th Session of UN GGIM, from 3-7 August 2015. In closing the first UN-GGIM: Arab States

AMOR LAARIBI



Amor Laaribi joined the United Nations Statistics Division Office in February 2000 to define and plan the Division's priorities in the area of geospatial information and to promote its use within census mapping in developing countries. He contributed to the foundation of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) and has been involved in the work of the UN Expert Group on the Integration of Statistical and Geospatial Information. He also acted as the secretary of UN Regional Cartographic Conferences and the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) at the Statistics Division (STAT/DESA).
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