

**Scoping Notes for
The Preparatory Meeting of the Proposed United Nations Committee of
Experts on Global Geographic Information Management, UNSD**

Royal Princess Hotel in Bangkok, Thailand, 25 October 2009.

By Fraser Taylor, President of ISCGM

It would like to raise the two following challenges:

1. How to more effectively serve the members of the United Nations when it comes to geospatial information;
2. How to ensure that there is a greater degree of coordination insider the UN system to ensure that maximum use is made of the existing efforts.

As far as topic one is concerned, I agree with Mr. Fukushima that the national mapping agencies have a major role to play. As you know, United Nations, for the International Steering Committee for Global Mapping, has been a critical factor in the success of Global Map, which is driven by the needs of the member nations. We would certainly like to see this partnership and support continue and expand as Global Map enters phase III of its plans. As you know, Global Map was established through the United Nations' process and was recently re-endorsed at the Johannesburg meeting. A further statement of support and coordination with your division would, I think, be a useful way ahead.

Global Map is, of course, not the only global effort to use map data more effectively at a global scale. There has been a recent development through OneGeology to create a 1:1 million scale digital geological map of the world through the geological surveys of each nation. The model to develop OneGeology was built using the Global Map process and we have been involved in helping OneGeology get off the ground.

The first step, in my view, is to ensure that whatever the United Nations does responds to the demands and needs of individual national mapping organizations. Too often in the past a supply-driven approach has been used and this rarely proves successful. There is a marked difference, for example, between the various regional cartographic conferences and the Cambridge Conference organized every four years by the Ordnance Survey in the UK. Invitation to the Cambridge Conference goes out only to the heads of national mapping agencies and selected other individuals. No substitutions are allowed and this helps to ensure that the key decision makers are present. The agenda is driven by the needs of the national mapping organizations and the conference is very well attended and very effective. One possibility would be to follow the Cambridge Conference model in the organization of UN regional cartographic conferences. The emphasis is on exchange of views on issues of critical importance to the national mapping organizations and much less on reports from each of them on their progress, which in my view take up too much time at the regional cartographic conferences. By having the regional conferences driven by the national mapping agencies I think that more progress would be made.

Place-based information is now of increasing importance to all nations and the national mapping agencies are important players in providing the basic map coverage required for this. If you have not already seen the recent memorandum from senior members of the Obama administration entitled “Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Department and Agencies (M-09-28)” and dated August 11, 2009, I would suggest that you look at it. You will note that there is no mention of GSDI, NSDI or any of the current jargon but a strong emphasis on the importance of developing both policies and programs based on place. This is written in a form that senior decision makers, who are not geospatial specialists, can understand and relate to. We have discussed in the past the importance of using place as an integrating element for all of the activities of your Division. I think the need to bring statistical information and geospatial information together is a pressing one and we need to establish more effective relationships between national mapping organizations and national statistical organizations. Again, I feel that this is an important way forward and your Division could take the lead in this respect. At the moment we effectively have two solitudes and the link between socio-economic information and geospatial information is one that needs to be made.

Another issue is to ensure that the various geospatial databases that are being built at a global scale are more interoperable. To ensure that global databases can be used together increases their value in decision making.

These are just a few preliminary thoughts for your consideration and we can discuss some of these more in Bangkok.