Scoping Paper for the Proposed United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geographic Information Management

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The network built upon linkages with global and regional geospatial organizations and mapping agencies, and associated liaison activities, has proved very effective and productive over many years. These relationships have facilitated and promoted information and data sharing, and implementation of collaborative projects across national and regional boundaries. In SDI, interoperability is a growing trend and a key for further successful development and application of geospatial data. However, the global SDI community has to work together to remove barriers, not only through standardization efforts, but also through institutional and legal systems so that it can meet challenges presented by the ever changing and evolving needs of the today's world. Unfortunately, there is no real mechanism to 'institutionalize' these issues and challenges, either in the SDI community or within and across individual countries. There is no doubt that geospatial technologies are now reaching a stage of advancement and maturity so that the remaining policy and governance issues and challenges can be confronted head on. A Global Geo-information Management Group under the auspices of the United Nations would facilitate and progress this.

Mapping and geographic information are on the cusp of playing a major "information infrastructure" role globally. We are seeing significant changes in the "traditional" functions and operational roles of national mapping agencies, not only within the Asia-Pacific region, but around the globe. The daily business of mapping agencies is no longer just about coordination and delivery of cartographic and related activities. Today, there is a much greater recognition of the many broad uses of 'fundamental' topographic and administrative information. At its most basic, member states are striving to transform their mapping into digital information as a mandatory requirement to achieve spatial enablement, even before contemplating SDI concepts. However, once this is achieved, the data then becomes much more useful than just topographic data, and becomes much more accessible by a wider community of users and consumers. As a minimum, every country should have access to the 'road map' to develop an SDI and cadastral/land administration capacity, at least within their borders. The reality is that many nations do not yet have some of the most basic geospatial capacity, most of which are those developing nations that are most vulnerable and in most need.

At the same time, the future state (quickly becoming the present state) is no longer just about enabling GIS and SDI capacity either. The message and motivation is consistent across many forums. How can geospatial information and related technologies be readily applied to the contemporary issues and challenges facing the world today? Thus, it is not just about the data and technology, but also the infrastructure, policy and governance to enable the information to be leveraged, integrated and delivered appropriately, and in a timely manner. For example, it is now common understanding that spatial information and related services are indispensable tools to support disaster mitigation and management. But how well do we do it organizationally, nationally, regionally or globally? There are examples of best practice, but there are also examples of total absence of spatial information.

The mapping and spatial agencies should be able to act as the data providers and integrators, and that data needs to be connected to the requirements of users across all levels of governments. Issues pertaining to integrating SDI's, capacity building, volunteer geographic information, maximizing mapping with minimum investment, spatially enabled

government/societies, the use of geospatial information in response to disasters, research and innovation, land information convergence, etc. are all real and valid in today's world. Representing our collective member countries and organizations within a global community, we must be cognizant of such issues and directions.

Discussions should be made on how a global mapping community must develop the coordinated means and mechanisms to contribute to spatial enablement, to sustainable development, to the Millennium Development Goals, to climate change, and to disaster risk reduction, while the ultimate goal of national, regional and global SDI development is pursued. These are the drivers, this is the need, and we have the capacity and capability – should we want to.