

**SECOND HIGH LEVEL FORUM ON
GLOBAL GEOSPATIAL INFORMATION MANAGEMENT**

SUMMARY OF THE CHAIRPERSON

Wednesday, 6 February 2013

**Sheikh Hamad Bin Jabor Bin Jassim Al Thani
President, Qatar Statistics Authority
State of Qatar**

The Second High Level Forum on Global Geospatial Information Management, held in Doha from 4 to 6 February 2013, brought together 300 participants from 60 countries, 10 United Nations representatives, and 50 representatives from international organizations and the private sector. The Forum was preceded on 3 February 2013 by an Exchange Forum attended by the private sector, research and development institutes, and government representatives.

The Forum was opened by H.E. Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim Bin Jabr Al-Thani, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Qatar; Sheikh Hamad Bin Jabor Bin Jassim Al Thani, President, Qatar Statistics Authority; Mr Wu Hongbo, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs; Dr. Vanessa Lawrence, Co-Chair, UN Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management; and Prof. William Cartwright, President of the Joint Board of Geospatial Information Societies.

The Prime Minister observed that the Forum came at a time when some countries and regions were facing a number of social, economic, environmental and political challenges that adversely affected their process of growth and development. International cooperation, through an agreed roadmap with a long term vision, would greatly help to support the recovery efforts. In this context, the use of information linked to geographic location is instrumental in national development. Efforts to support the developing countries were critically needed in accordance to these countries' priorities. He urged the countries to work together and develop well-thought-out and long-term plans to address issues on sustainable development through the appropriate use of geospatial information.

The Forum began with a Ministerial Segment with Ministers from eight countries (Qatar, Bahrain, Belgium, Burkina Faso, Fiji, Nigeria, Republic of Azerbaijan, and USA) sharing their views on the role of geospatial information in national development. This was followed by five thematic sessions focusing on "Building a National Geospatial Information System: Driving Forces, Success Stories", "Future Trends in Geospatial Information: Growing the Information Base, Promoting Greater Use", "Developing an Effective Global Geodetic Reference Framework and Supporting Location-Based Services", "Geospatial Information and Sustainable Development (Rio+20)", and "Challenges in Developing Core Global Reference Datasets".

The main issues that surfaced in the discussions are summarized in the following paragraphs, including concrete proposals for action to be considered by the UN-GGIM Committee of Experts:

1. The Ministers commended the efforts of the United Nations for promoting a global understanding on geospatial information and emphasized the importance of the UN-GGIM as a mechanism to harness the power of geospatial information to assist national development efforts. This platform for international cooperation could be very useful to assist countries to continue the development of a credible national system of geospatial information, and underlined that geospatial information developments must link into mainstream e-government evolutions.

2. The Ministers indicated that there is a growing understanding of the social and economic benefits of geospatial information and that it is a strategic asset of critical importance to guide the actions of Governments in meeting the expectations of their people. A number of concrete examples of the important role of geospatial information in policy formulation were highlighted by the Ministers. The Ministers emphasized the need of coordination across ministries and agencies to ensure quality and standardized geospatial information.

3. Several common challenges were also explicitly referenced, including: sustainable geodetic networks, mitigating and managing disasters, population growth and food security, urban planning and sustainable development, and privacy and confidentiality in the face of growing public demands for data access. The Ministers stressed the importance of working together across borders and sharing experiences and advancements in geospatial information management, in order to address these critical issues and to enhance comparability across countries.

4. Ministers' views were echoed by the delegates who, in turn, expressed their appreciation that geospatial information management was now being given greater attention at the highest political level. The need for a long term vision, the understanding of the returns on investment and the demand to derive value from the information were emphasized in the development of national geospatial information infrastructures. The Forum recognized that UN-GGIM would be an important platform to advocate for such long term vision and investment in national geospatial information systems.

5. The Forum recognized the critical importance of establishing a coherent national geospatial information system to integrate, coordinate, manage, and deliver geospatial information for timely and authoritative decision making and policy development. The importance of coordination at all levels was stressed as a critical success factor, as geospatial information is being increasingly used to inform national visions, strategic plans and economic transformation projects, demonstrating its use and importance to national development.

6. The Forum discussed the importance of having a steady supply of trained technical experts in managing geospatial information to support the establishment of a national

system. The development of appropriate curriculum at all levels was discussed, and it was agreed that as technology continued to advance rapidly, the need to constantly update the skill sets became important. There was general recognition of the need for appropriate executive and managerial training to lead geospatial activities at various levels within an organization. International cooperation in this regard was deemed essential and desired.

7. The role of the private sector in strengthening national geospatial information infrastructure was discussed. It was agreed that the private sector could play a critical role, but the government needed to ensure the interest of the public would be safeguarded and that credibility and reliability of the information could be ensured.

8. The Forum took note of the report on the future trends in geospatial information management as important reference document for informing the geospatial community. It welcomed the case studies which illustrated interesting application of geospatial information in various areas. The Forum urged more case studies be submitted to demonstrate the usefulness of such information.

9. The role of the national geospatial information authorities as the originator and custodian of trusted and authoritative data in face of rapidly changing technology was discussed. In this role, the authorities need to position themselves to be more agile, to facilitate the adoption of rapidly changing technologies, to manage larger amount of data, to provide the policy and legal framework to protect the public from potential abuse, and to balance the demand for information against privacy concerns. Regularly updating the regulations governing geospatial information was deemed to be necessary, and it was noted that the authorities were taking on a 'regulator' role as well.

10. The Forum noted the importance of regional cooperation and the successful programmes implemented in some regions. Greater efforts could be made in this regard, especially in regions that do not have a mechanism for regional collaboration. A road map for the establishment of such a regional mechanism would be useful. The Forum welcomed the United Nations' initiative to convene the first meeting of geospatial information authorities of the UNESCWA region.

11. The Forum addressed the need for a sound and sustainable global geodetic reference frame and noted the significant contributions made by the International Association for Geodesy (IAG) over the past 150 years. It was noted that the current International Terrestrial Reference Frame (ITRF) and other products developed and maintained by IAG were endorsed and used by many countries. The role of the private sector in providing location-based positioning services was also discussed.

12. The Forum noted that the increasing need for the global geodetic system to track changes such as terrestrial adjustments and sea level rise would require significant refinement to the current systems and need for further precision. Expansion in the current geodetic observing infrastructure such as the receiving stations, combined with greater interoperability, willingness to share of data, and coherence to standards would be required.

13. The Forum agreed that while the science of establishing a sound geodetic reference frame is available, it was essential to have the governments accept the responsibility of establishing and maintaining a sound national geodetic reference frame which could serve as the foundation for a global system. Some countries had expanded their national system on account of economic benefits through better located-based positioning services. It was agreed that the UN-GGIM has an important role to play and that a resolution at the General Assembly of the United Nations urging the governments to support a global geodetic frame would provide a strong mandate for further development of the frame.

14. The Forum recognised that the Rio+20 outcome document had given important recognition to the role of geospatial information in sustainable development. This message was echoed in other fora and discussions. The implementation of this mandate became important and the Forum welcomed the development of suitable applications through the Global Map for Sustainable Development initiative. Further work would be guided by the Sustainable Development Goals currently being established by the United Nations.

15. The Forum took note of the importance of understanding natural hazards and its impact on the population as called for in the Rio+20 document. It welcomed the initiative to begin work on urban hazard mapping, the development of appropriate models and the testing of mitigation strategies.

16. The Forum discussed the importance of establishing standards for the entire production and dissemination process of geospatial information and could cover additional areas such as management systems, description of skills, competency and knowledge, licensing agreements and geodetic references. It was noted that ISO and Open Geospatial Consortium were taking the lead in the development of many of the standards.

17. The Forum recognized that, with the increasing volumes of geospatial data available, the assurance of data quality was critical. Proper protocol should be established to meet international standards. The varying levels of data quality and precision should be identified to facilitate seamless data integration and exchange.

18. The Forum recognized the importance of establishing fundamental datasets at national and international level to help in the standardization and improvement of quality. The custodian and stewardship of these datasets should be clearly spelt out and the role of the geospatial information authority be identified within a network of producers and users. Accountability and governance issues should be addressed. Common data themes that have been widely used included geocoded addressing, boundaries, positioning, place names, elevation, land cover, transport, water and land parcel.

19. The Forum recognized that existing international examples, such as INSPIRE, GEOSS and the MGCP programme, provide a valuable blueprint on the specifications of fundamental datasets. They illustrated cooperation across countries in the production of standardized datasets and served as good examples to build global platforms for fundamental datasets.

20. The Forum took note of the discussion at the Exchange Forum, moderated by JB-GIS, by the private sector, research and development institutes and government representatives which recognized that future proofing the provision of place based information was critical for global, regional and national development. Four themes centred around “place” were explored where new technologies and methodologies in “determining”, “monitoring”, “connecting” and ‘delivering’ place were examined. The geospatial community reaffirmed their commitment to continually exchange ideas and practices with the wider community to advance the objectives of UN-GGIM.

21. The Forum adopted the Doha Declaration at the conclusion of the Forum.