

Preparatory Meeting of the Proposed United Nations Committee on Global Geographic Information Management

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Scoping Paper on Global Coordination of Geographic Information Management

Prepared by UN Secretariat¹

1. Background

ECOSOC resolution 131 (VI) of 19 February 1948 on "Co-ordination of Cartographic Services of Specialized Agencies and International Organizations" recognized the importance of maps to global activities and the benefits of coordinating cartographic services of the United Nations and its member states. It highlighted the interest of several member governments in a coordinated programme of international cartography.

ECOSOC resolution 476 (XV) of 6 April 1953 on "International Co-operation on Cartography" and subsequent resolutions led to the holding of regional cartographic conferences by the United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Pacific (UNRCC-AP) and the United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for the Americas (UNRCC-A).

Recent resolutions of the UNRCC-AP and UNRCC-A reaffirm the need for regional and global cooperation on geographic information. In addition, they endorse the work of the United Nations Geographic Information Working Group (UNGIWG), which include, *inter alia*, the development of a United Nations geographic database and the call for a United Nations commission on geographic information.

2. Rationale for creating a Global Forum

a. Global dimension of today's challenges

- Climate change, natural disasters, disease outbreaks, economic and food crises, outbreak of wars, population migration, etc. are all cross-border challenges that require global response.
- Solid quantitative information and analysis is needed to tackle these global crises. As every event happens somewhere in the

¹ This paper was prepared following countries consultation on the occasion of the 9th UNRCC-A in August 2009 in New York.

world, geographic information provides an ideal base for integrating data across sectors: demographic, economic, social, environmental, etc.

- There is an increasing amount of geographic data being created and captured, as in the case of high-resolution satellite imagery and large scale digital elevation data and maps, from local to global level. However, there is currently no global governance body to manage and utilize this large volume of data in the most effective manner.

b. Paradigm shift

- Rapid advances in geographic information technology enable complex modeling and solving of real-world problems, expanding the traditional role of maps to information management and catering to a largely extended base of users.
- Whilst traditional cartography is a monopoly of national mapping agencies, geographic information involves many stakeholders.
- Today's challenges require a global, in addition to a regional, "cartographic" focus and the need to realign "cartographic" work with the management of geographic information and spatial data infrastructure (SDI).
- A Regional or Global Spatial Data Infrastructure (R/GSDI) is a partnership of many National Spatial Data Infrastructures (NSDIs), which requires cooperation for consistency, interoperability, sharing, etc.
- National agencies (mapping, statistics and others) need a mandate, such as a United Nations General Assembly resolution, to allow them to produce substantial, internationally standardized products.

c. Need for global coordination

- Need for better coordination between the United Nations Regional Cartographic Conferences and their regional Permanent Committees on SDI and other inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations active in the field of geographic information.
- Need for a global forum to provide coherent geographic information management to support global activities. Such forum facilitates the coordination of geographic information activities, establishment of standards and agreements, sharing of best practices, etc.

3. United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geographic Information Management (UNCEGGIM)

The basic aims of the Committee are:

- (i) Coordinate the work on geographical information management at the national, regional and international levels in order to demonstrate the importance and benefits of such coordination;
- (ii) Collect the best practices of national, regional and international bodies dealing with legal instruments, management models and technical standards for the building of spatial data infrastructures, and facilitate the dissemination of these practices and experiences to member states of the United Nations;
- (iii) Propose principles, policies, methods and mechanisms for standardization, interoperability and sharing of geographic data, with a view to helping Member States, and in particular developing countries;

(iv) Provide a vehicle for liaison and coordination among member states, and between the United Nations Regional Cartographic Conferences and their regional Permanent Committees on SDI and other inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, on work associated with the management of geographical information;

(v) Implement the tasks assigned as a result of the resolutions adopted at United Nations Conferences on Global Geographical Information Management.

Based on the upcoming legislating resolutions and working arrangements of the Committees, a Group of Experts meeting can later elaborate on: Terms of reference; Membership, composition and term of office; Modus operandi; Reporting procedures; Frequency of meetings; Secretariat support; Meeting documentation; Resource requirements, etc.