

**Opening Speech by Dr Vanessa Lawrence CB, Co-Chair of the
United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial
Information Management**

Monday 4th February 2013

Honourable Ministers,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

May I echo the sentiments of the distinguished speakers who have already addressed you and, on behalf of the UN-GGIM Committee of Experts, thank the Government of Qatar for hosting this, the Second High-Level Forum on Global Geospatial Information Management.

In addition, may I thank His Excellency Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim Bin Jabor Al-Thani the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, His Excellency Sheikh Hamad Bin Jabor bin Jassim Al Thani, President, Qatar Statistics Authority and Under-Secretary General Wu Hongbo for their welcome and kind words.

As the elected Co-Chair of the Committee of Experts, which is an official inter-governmental mechanism of the United Nations, and on behalf of all my esteemed colleagues on whose behalf I stand here, it is a great honour to welcome you all to what I am sure will be a very informative and productive event.

I am pleased to see that so many distinguished delegates, from all corners of the world and all parts of our geospatial community, have been able to meet here in Doha.

UN-GGIM has been formally established for a little over a year and a half and I think it is right to reflect on what has been achieved in that time.

The Committee of Experts, established to drive forward this important agenda on behalf of Member States, has met twice – first in October 2011, when we were so kindly hosted by our colleagues from the Republic of Korea, and again in New York in August 2012.

Many important discussions have taken place at those meetings and work has continued in between, to ensure that this Committee, and this initiative, deliver tangible benefits.

In addition, we took part in the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (known to many as Rio+20), in which we raised the awareness amongst senior decision-makers of the importance of 'place and locality' and the necessity of a solid geospatial information base to deliver on the Conference's ambitions and proposed outcomes.

The reaction we received from attendees at those sessions, which drew crowds to over-capacity, demonstrated that, whilst there is much to do to inform our Government colleagues of the importance of geospatial information, once such people are exposed to this information they really can see its immense value.

During the past ten months, we have brought together many of the leading thinkers and visionaries from across our geospatial community to produce a paper outlining the major trends we are likely to see in the next five to ten years.

This will hopefully help us all to understand the trends, the challenges and the opportunities we are likely to face in the coming years, and, in doing so, help us to establish a shared vision to embrace and address these trends.

We also have seen the laying of further foundations that will help to ensure that items and issues discussed at UN-GGIM can be taken forward and delivered by all Member States in all regions.

Regional bodies, able and committed to taking forward issues discussed and decisions made, at the annual gatherings of the Committee of Experts, are now being created across the globe.

In this regard, I am delighted that the regional committee for Asia-Pacific has now become UN-GGIM Asia-Pacific. Important work is underway in other regions too.

I understand that the Regional Cartographic Conference for the Americas in August may also see that regional committee evolve into UN-GGIM Americas. In Europe, a new group has recently been set up with a view to establishing a UN-GGIM Europe, and I should like to thank my colleagues in Eurostat, the European Commission and EuroGeographics for their support in driving that forward.

I am conscious also, of the hard work and commitment being shown in Africa, currently under the auspices of CODIST-GEO.

At the end of this conference, there is a very important meeting taking place, to ensure that Western Asia is included, and has a mechanism to ensure effective engagement with UN-GGIM.

An inventory of issues has been created, with considerable input from the Member States and from which the Committee's work programme is being drawn, to ensure that this Committee addresses issues that are important to Member States from all regions of the World.

As Under-Secretary-General Wu Hongbo noted, work is already on-going in major areas, drawn from this inventory, such as establishing a global geodetic reference framework and developing core global reference datasets.

Geodetic reference systems, as we all know, are an essential component of the infrastructure of a modern economy. This initiative is in a unique position to bring together experts, formally representing their Governments, to discuss such matters and ensure that national developments are aligned with a global reference system and that the vast benefits of such an approach are realised.

We will hear later this week about the work that has been undertaken, under the auspices of this Committee, to build on the excellent work undertaken in other forums in this important field.

Likewise, we all know that in order to tackle some of the greatest challenges we face as a society today – eradicating poverty, promoting sustainable patterns of consumption and production, and protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development – we need to understand more about our environment.

Fundamental to this, is increasing our understanding of 'place'. In order to do this, and in order for those who are making the important decisions on how to address these issues - solid, reliable and accurate 'place-based' information is needed.

A reliable and accurate geospatial information base is at the heart of this. Via its work with both senior diplomats in our Permanent Missions to the UN and through the National Mapping and Cadastral Authorities or equivalent authority in each country, the UN-GGIM Committee of Experts is driving work to ensure that such an information base is developed and available right across the globe.

I believe we have laid strong foundations in this past year and a half; foundations which will help UN-GGIM to grow as a recognised thought-leader on matters related to geospatial information, and which will help it

to realise a vision - To make accurate, reliable and authoritative geospatial information readily available to support national, regional and global development.

The real challenge, I think, for us now, is to build on these foundations. To ensure that we continue to make progress, take concrete actions and deliver things that will make a real difference

- a real difference to you and to me as representatives of our Governments and key stakeholders in national and regional geospatial issues;
- a real difference to decision-makers in our countries and our regions – to our Governments, our businesses;
- and in doing so, to make a real difference to the citizens right across the world.....

...to help to ensure that decisions taken that affect us all, are made based on a sound evidence base, and an evidence base that is underpinned by accurate, reliable and maintained geospatial information.

There is much hard work to be undertaken to ensure that this happens but I am confident that working together, and, importantly, working with other entities and actors involved in geospatial information, we can achieve this.

Thank you.