

**Introductory Remarks at the First International Forum of the United Nations  
Geospatial Information and Services for Disasters, Hilton Resort Hotel,  
September 04 – 05, 2016**

His Excellency Mr. **Jesús A. López González**, Ambassador of Mexico  
in Trinidad & Tobago and other Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Mr. **Rolando Ocampo**, Co-Chair UN Committee of Experts on Global  
Geospatial Information Management , and Vice President of National  
Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI);

**Mr. Kyoung-Soo Eom**, Chief UNGIS, Department of Field Support  
UN-GGIM Secretariat;

Mrs. Valrie Grant, President of URISA Caribbean;

Ms. Wendy Nelson, Executive Director of URISA International;

Heads of National Mapping and Geospatial Agencies and Disaster  
Management Organisations;

Representatives from UN Secretariat and its Agencies;

Representatives of other International Organisations, including Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs);

Distinguished Delegates;

Specially Invited Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is indeed an honour for me to welcome you to Barbados to participate in this First International Forum on Geospatial Information and Services for Disasters under the auspices of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM).

Your presence in Barbados at this time coincides with the year-long celebration we are having of our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Independence and we are happy to embrace your presence as part of that celebration.

For the full period of its independence Barbados has been a member of the United Nations and have been both an active participant and beneficiary of its programmes. Barbados is also proud to be the area headquarters for several UN agencies, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Programme (UNICEF). The Government of Barbados demonstrates its on-going commitment to the UN in several ways, including the provision of ultra-modern accommodation for the Agencies resident here.

I mentioned this information only to help you understand the long-standing relationship Barbados continues to have with the UN and therefore to emphasise the pleasure we have in hosting this Forum. I wish all of you a beneficial and enjoyable time in Barbados and I hope you have the opportunity to see the beauty of our country and feel the warm hospitality of Barbadians.

As we commemorate our 50th year of Independence and reflect on our national development, we are very aware of the nature of disasters

and the impact they have on the livelihood of societies. We are also cognisant of the need to have preparedness at the core of national and regional planning. I must stress regional planning, as there are some forms of disasters, which know no boundaries, and even when disasters are country specific, it is important for those who are not directly affected to provide assistance.

No country is immune to risks and losses incurred by the wrath of natural disasters. The past month alone has seen human loss and economic damages from an earthquake in central Italy, flooding in Louisiana, United States of America and the passing of Tropical Storm Earl affecting the Dominican Republic, Belize and Mexico.

This region, Latin America and the Caribbean, encompasses a cluster of Small Island Developing States where our vulnerability is exacerbated by our small size, large percentage of the population living in hazard-prone coastal areas and limited capacity for disaster risk reduction. The “Trends in Sustainable Development of SIDS, 2010”

report produced by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs indicates that our regional neighbours St. Lucia and Grenada have recorded some of the highest economic losses in capital stock, in relative terms, due to natural disasters between 1970 and 2006.

Therefore, increasing the role of geospatial information in supporting all phases of the disaster cycle is paramount to all countries. There must be a commitment from all stakeholders to ensure the accessibility of good quality geospatial data from authoritative sources to underpin decision making for disaster management specialists. Your work provides the platform for linking information, which is vital to the management of our environment, and priceless in the integration of the social, economic and financial components of our regional economies. When we do this well, we achieve sustainable development.

So please permit me to congratulate the UN-GGIM Working Group on the Draft Strategic Framework Document which is under consideration at this Forum and which was presented at the Sixth UN-GGIM Meeting of Experts. I have been made to understand that the

Strategic Framework received overwhelming support from member states and representatives present at the meeting. We look forward to its further refinement as you share your experiences on disaster response and the use of Geospatial Information and Services for disasters during this Forum.

The Caribbean Project of UN-GGIM:Americas has played a significant role towards the regional development of spatial data infrastructure through capacity building and infrastructure acquisition. The Government of Barbados wishes to express our heartfelt gratitude to the Mr. Rolando Ocampo and the Government of Mexico for their unwavering support.

In closing, I recognise and thank the organisers and facilitators including the Secretariat of United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management, the Regional Committee of United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for Americas, the Caribbean Chapter of the Urban and Regional Information Systems Association, the Government of Mexico through the Mexican

Agency for International Development Cooperation, the National System for Territorial Information, Chilean Ministry of National Assets and the Government of China through the UN-GGIM China Trust Fund.

I wish you a productive session and encourage you to explore and enjoy the activities and attractions of Barbados.

Thank you.