

Distinguished Participants,
Dear Colleagues
Ladies and Gentleman

Allow me to invite you to a discovery. We have come together today to adventure a new avenue in our region, and I am glad on behalf of my colleagues at the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia that you agreed to take this challenge together with us.

We are opening a new gate, and none of us knows what will follow. But we know that we are all determined to take this challenge and bring benefits of advances in geospatial information management to our region. To do so, we have to put our forces together, and our main goal at today's seminar is to put in place a coordination mechanism in our region, and to outline a roadmap for the regional work on geospatial information.

This opens pertinent questions. What does our region expect of us, what are the key issues, challenges and priorities? Who are the stakeholders, how are they related, what would be their best common platform? An finally, we shall ask ourselves, where we would like to be in a year or two, and where in five years from now? Yes, we are opening an empty sheet, but in a region that is culturally rich, that has well educated experts, and that has already gained knowledge on geospatial information management. Therefore, we should listen to already accumulated experiences of Arab nations, and then we shall attempt to put this regional wealth of knowledge together. So yes, we are opening the first empty sheet of a new book, but we have already stories that we can put on this sheet, and our goal is to agree on the design of our new book.

At the same time, we are being watched by the World, as the wait our region to complete the map of the Global Geospatial Information Management initiative. Today we will listen to some experiences of other regions, and we will look for inspiration from their experience, from the way how they organized regional cooperation on geospatial information management. I am convinced that soon we will be able to share with them our own experiences and achievements. So let's listen to our colleagues how is the GGIM initiative organized at the global level, in Asia-Pacific and Europe. Let's listen also to examples of practical implementation of the GGIM.

There is a third challenge, and let me to share it with you. We at the UN-ESCWA are committed to support socio-economic development in our region in all aspects. UN-ESCWA is an institution focusing on information and knowledge. However, putting in place a regional mechanism on GGIM is for us the same challenge and discovery as for you. Maybe, even more. I am coming together with my colleague Neda from the Statistics Division. We are used to work with national statistical offices, we have a technical expertise on various technical and managerial issues of official statistics. Therefore, as I said in the introduction, let's take this a common discovery.

However, the combination of the geospatial information and statistics can also open new and fascinating opportunities of analysis and utilisation of information, and this was spelled out many times over the past four days.

Obviously, we have many colleagues at ESCWA, and we have a combined technical expertise in various areas other than statistics. These include information and communication technologies, research and development, sustainable development social development, economic development and globalisation, conflict related issues, gender issues and social justice and others. Our role will not be only in providing

a logistics and organizational support, but also in substantive and technical input to the common regional work on GGIM.

Ladies and Gentleman,

I wish you a successful seminar that will bring this region one step further in the area of geospatial information management. Let's wish all of us that this seminar lies foundations for a strong and fruitful cooperation in the region. I hope that you enjoyed your stay in Doha and will remember this dynamic and modern city as a place, where we opened a new chapter of GGIM in our region.

We came to form a community of geospatial information management, so let's take the first step and let better know each other – with permission of the organizers. Please say your name, you affiliation and a one sentence about what do you expect from our today's seminar.

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Juraj Riecan, I lead the Statistics Division at UN-ESCWA, and my expectation is to identify priorities and goals of GGIM in our region in short and medium term, as to form a leadership group for regional coordination of GGIM.

Over to you, dear ladies and gentlemen...

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