



United Nations  
Economic Commission for Africa

## Fourth High Level Forum on United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management

'Good Land Governance for the 2030 Agenda'

Statement

By

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H.E. Dr. Mulatu Teshome, President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

Honourable Ministers from participating countries

Mr. Stefan Scheinfest, Director of the United Nations Statistics Division

Mr. Li Pengde, Co-Chair, UN-GGIM Committee of Experts

Mr. Mark Cygan, Joint Board of Geospatial Information Societies

Representatives of international geospatial organizations and United Nations Agencies

Excellences Heads of Diplomatic Missions,

Distinguished Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of Dr. Carlos Lopes, Executive Secretary of UNECA and indeed on my own behalf, I am delighted to welcome you all at the headquarters of the Economic Commission for Africa where the 4<sup>th</sup> High Level Forum of the United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management has been organized by the ECA in collaboration with the Government of Ethiopia through the Ethiopian Mapping Agency (EMA) and the United Nations Secretariat.

The theme of the conference “Good Land Governance for the 2030 Agenda” is not only relevant but is also timely as Africa accelerates its economic transformation agenda. Land information and its management are fundamental to successful land administration and the derived benefits, and overall sustainable development of countries. It is the base of all human activity and provides support for all life on earth. Access to land is therefore a very important part of human endeavour and achievement.

Land is limited and is not only fixed in quantity but also exists in fixed places. In a few instances and in isolation, land has been reclaimed from water but has not substantially increased in terms of quantity to the already existing fixed land. There is also another level of problems namely, ownership and management.

Therefore, there is need for relevant institutions to control and regulate the complex relationships that exist between and among members of the society by virtue of their occupation and use of land. These land management relationships, as they are called, consist of three important aspects, namely, the rights a person may have on land, ownership of these rights, and the information about these rights and their associated rules.

It is this last aspect of the information about rights and their associated rules that you will deliberate upon in the next three days. To manage any resource, we need to know what we have. We need an inventory of the resource, describing the resource,

giving details of their features and characteristics. Unfortunately, the problem has persisted despite the use of surveying and mapping techniques to delineate and describe the land resources.

This situation is more pronounced in Africa mainly because of lack of information to inform evidence based decision-making. There is an information gap on what resources are available and where. This has resulted in lack and poor investment decisions, and hence the disconnect between investors in the developed world and investment opportunities in Africa. Where information exists, it is normally outdated, uncoordinated or incomplete.

As you may know Africa has a poor mapping coverage of 2.9 % at the scale of 1/25.000 as compared to other regions such as Europe at 86.9%, America 54.1%, Asia 15.2%, etc.

**Your Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Delegates,**

In the framework of the Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development, it is of significant importance for Africa to have access to real time and precise spatial information given its size and complex biophysical environment, to support effective decision-making on land management. For instance, while Africa's demographic trends, including rapid urbanization represent economic opportunities, they also represent real challenges with regard to human welfare and infrastructure needs. Because of poor or lack of information availability, Africa is at risk of increasingly not being able understand the scale, speed

and locations of newly developing urban areas and informal settlements. It is therefore critical to make available information with a location component to enlighten the continents sustainable planning and development.

Credible land information and good land administration is fundamental for responsible governance of tenure, managing the use of land, coping with climate change and enforcing equity as well as human rights. This can only be attained with innovative mind-sets of land professionals to develop new approaches as well as the various interaction across generations of land professionals to ensure implementation over time. In order to effectively measure, monitor and mitigate sustainable development of land it is necessary to use geospatial information to link together demographic, statistical and environmental data.

The question is, how do we take advantage of the enabling capabilities of new information technologies and systems, specifically geospatial information technologies, which are usually not well developed in Africa?

This is one of the reasons this able august house assembled here has to address this challenge and others. We are happy to have participants from all over Africa and beyond to assist us in addressing these issues. I must make particular mention of our friends from the other Regional Committees on UN-GGIM, who have been most generous with their time, their energy and their resources in making it possible to tackle the ambitious agenda we

have proposed to you for the next three days on land governance and management information systems.

**Your Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Delegates,**

The Fourth High Level Forum on United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management provides a distinctive opportunity to build sustainable systems which can identify the way land is occupied and used and provide security of tenure and control of the use of land. Effective and democratized land governance is at the heart of delivering the global vision of our future as laid out in the SDGs.

As encapsulated in the ECA's new paradigm of transformative development in a renascent Africa – Putting Africa First, we need to renew our collective commitment to deliver relevant information that could promote and sustain economic growth. This information has added-value if it is spatially represented, leading to better informed-decisions to provide the right services at the right time at the right place. The new paradigm goes along with generating and disseminating diverse knowledge products to inform development decisions and track and monitor implementation. Therefore, the Commission is emphasizing "Africa First", which implies presenting the continent development agenda from an African perspective, basing the continent policy analysis and advocacy on sound and verifiable evidence. I am happy to say that geospatial information and its'

enabling capabilities will play a key role in this economic transformation reforms.

**Your Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Delegates,**

African governments and other sectors of society have become increasingly aware of the importance of geospatial science and technology as a tool to facilitate spatial data collection, access and use in the decision-making processes, both nationally and regionally. Supported by the emergence of a community of robust geospatial experts such as yourselves; geospatial technologies are gradually becoming the driving force of many applications and services from land administration to natural resource management to agriculture across countries like Kenya, Ghana, Rwanda and South Africa, to mention just a few.

To this end, I am expecting this High Level Forum to explore and deeply look into trends, practices and current developments of 'Good Land Governance for the 2030 Agenda', as well as propose updated guidelines that we can draw upon for future initiatives.

The deliberations from this conference will offer important inputs and recommendations on how to leverage geospatial technology in Africa to meet the continents priorities, outlined in the Africa 2063 Vision and the 2030 Agenda.

In my mind we all have a part to play and a duty to global society to share knowledge and contribute to the dialogue that will lead to solutions. We must however go beyond dialogue to walking the talk. As former Secretary General Kofi Anan once said, *"We must move from promises to practices, from commitments to concrete projects, from intentions to implementation."*

The conference is expected to come up with concrete recommendations and a check-list of desirable actions for ECA, member States, partners, and the private sector and the civil society to implement in order to help steer the future development of geospatial applications for land governance and management in Africa.

**Your Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Delegates,**

I would like to conclude here, by congratulating the United Nations Committee of Experts on UN-GGIM, the Regional Committees on UN-GGIM and all partners for the excellent collaboration exhibited in preparing this conference.

The ECA remain resolute in forging the relationships with United Nations Committee of Experts on UN-GGIM and other partners to ensure that the objectives are attained through the promotion of comprehensive dialogue on global geospatial information management with all relevant governments and non-government organisations and the private sector. The Commission remains



committed to promote and support technical activities, in such a way that they anticipate the future potential use of geospatial information resources to address emerging issues of land governance on the continent.

I wish to reiterate and assure you of ECA's willingness to use its convening power to enhance its dialogue with member States, African sciences and research institutions, as well as other sectors in order to increase awareness and ensure that geospatial science and technology permeates every aspect of our societies.

I wish the High Level Forum great success in its deliberation.

Thank you for your kind attention.