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MR. LIU ZHENMIN

UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Concluding Remarks

Tenth Session of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM)

Third Virtual Informal Meeting, New York, 4 September 2020

Dear Co-Chairs of the Committee of Experts,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates and Observers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to join you on this third day of the informal session of the Committee on Global Geospatial Information Management – better known under its acronym UN-GGIM. As some of you may know, this body was the first United Nations body that I addressed when I assumed my responsibility as United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs three years ago. Ever since, I have held a deep respect for this professional community. So, I am very grateful that over 400 of you will be connected over the course of the three days, and I extend a warm welcome to all of you.

I also extend my appreciation and congratulate you for the productive way in which you have prepared for and conducted your substantive business for these meetings. When I look at your programme, I am impressed by the tools you have developed over the past year, working hard as a community across the globe:

First, there is the “Implementation Guide of the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework”. This will provide guidance for Member States to strengthen their national geospatial information management arrangements. It will also support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, especially in developing countries.

Second, in your report on the ‘Future Trends in Geospatial Information Management’, you have articulated a bold, forward looking vision. You have identified emerging trends that can be harnessed by all Member States to increase the use of geospatial information for social, technological, and economic growth.

Distinguished delegates,

I am particularly pleased to learn that our efforts at the United Nations to establish – with the strong and generous support of the Government of China - a Global Geospatial Knowledge and Innovation Centre in Deqing, China, which are going through the final administrative approvals. I am convinced this Center will provide welcome opportunities to build and expand global geospatial capacity, competence and capability.

Also, I note that you have welcomed the offer from the Federal Republic of Germany to establish and host a Global Geodetic Centre of Excellence at the United Nations Campus in Bonn, Germany. In line with the General Assembly resolution on a global geodetic reference frame, this Centre of Excellence will enhance global cooperation and coordination across Member States in this important technical field.

Distinguished delegates,

While these are only a few of the highlights for this tenth session, they clearly show how much this Committee has progressed over the past ten years of its existence, including its rightful place in the ECOSOC architecture. I commend in particular the many interlinkages you have made to create a global geospatial community, across countries, technical fields, and across all relevant stakeholders. I am also grateful for your outreach and close cooperation with other data communities, such as the official statisticians. This will enhance the power of integrated data for policy decision making. All this provides a strong foundation for you to report back to the Economic and Social Council in 2021.

Still, there are always new challenges that will arise.

The COVID-19 pandemic has set us back in reaching critical goals. Bold, critical and urgent action is needed at all levels of society to reduce child mortality, mitigate climate change, eliminate extreme poverty and achieve the ambitious targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The pandemic has not only exacerbated our world's vulnerabilities within and among countries, it has reinforced pre-existing obstacles – including structural inequalities and socio-economic gaps – to realizing the SDGs. The lack of timely, fundamental data and enabling technologies to measure and monitor what is happening where, when, and how, is a permanent challenge for your communities. And at the same time, it is a unique opportunity.

I am encouraged to see that the global geospatial information community, through this Committee of Experts, has demonstrated its readiness to respond to the challenge of COVID-19 through a dedicated paper and country case studies. In this regard, the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework has provided an anchor for the national response for countries. Indeed, a first step for many to develop dashboards to communicate and visualise the spread of COVID-19.

Distinguished Delegates and Observers,

In closing, I recognize and thank the co-Chairs of your Committee, all the Chairpersons and leaders of the regional committees, subcommittee, expert groups, working groups, networks, the authors of technical reports and the Rapporteur. I commend your strong and productive sense

of global cooperation and coordination, particularly in these challenging times of the global pandemic

I thank you, and wish you all the best with the completion of your session.
