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Strengthening of geospatial information management

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Note by the Secretariat

Summary

The present paper contains the report of the Secretariat on strengthening geospatial information management for consideration by the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management.

At its tenth session, held virtually on 26 and 27 August and 4 September 2020, the Committee of Experts adopted decision 10/101, in which it recognized the considerable efforts of the Secretariat and the expanded Bureau of the Committee in continuing to take strategic and practical action to strengthen geospatial information management and related interlinkages for Member States, in line with the broadened mandate of the Committee pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution [2016/27](#). The Committee also noted the efforts made to improve and strengthen national geospatial information capacity-building activities in developing countries, to ensure that extrabudgetary resources were made available through several funding options and mechanisms and to scale up efforts in that regard in order to avoid widening the geospatial digital divide. The Committee acknowledged that the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework was the culmination of the broad programme of work carried out over the past 10 years, not only as evidence of the achievements of the Committee to date but as a means of enabling Member States to integrate and strengthen their national geospatial information management arrangements according to their national circumstances. The Committee also acknowledged that, when coupled with a strong portfolio of outputs from the broader programme of the Committee, the Framework provided a strong foundation for reporting back to the Council in 2021. In addition, in adopting decision 10/103, the Committee noted the global significance of the Framework, which served as a key umbrella for the many activities under the purview of the Committee.

In this present report, prepared with the assistance of the expanded Bureau of the Committee of Experts, the Secretariat provides information on efforts to continue strengthening the coordination and coherence of global geospatial information management in the areas of capacity-building, norm-setting, data collection, data dissemination and data sharing, among others, and ensuring that the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework is used as an overarching guide for the broad

* E/C.20/2021/1

programme of work and the activities of the Committee, including those of its regional committees and functional groups, in order to ensure that the strategic and practical actions of the Committee contribute consistently to efforts of Member States aimed at strengthening their geospatial information management arrangements.

This present report serves to highlight specific initiatives aimed at improving and strengthening national geospatial information management for Member States. There has been substantial progress by the United Nations and the Government of China on establishing the United Nations global geospatial knowledge and innovation centre in Deqing, China, including a programme of work to build, develop and expand global geospatial capacity, competence and capability, especially in developing countries. The report also provides details of efforts by the United Nations and the Government of Germany to establish a global geodetic centre of excellence at the United Nations campus in Bonn, Germany, to enhance global geodetic cooperation and coordination among Member States and relevant geodetic stakeholders, strengthen geodetic infrastructure, support Member States in improving their national contributions towards the sustainability and quality of the global geodetic reference frame, and advance the implementation of General Assembly resolution [69/266](#) on a global geodetic reference frame for sustainable development.

The report also serves to highlight contributions from extrabudgetary resources that support the activities of the Committee of Experts. These include activities under the second phase of the China trust fund to improve and strengthen national geospatial information management arrangements and capacities, in particular in developing countries, activities under the eleventh tranche of the United Nations Development Account project, which is focused on improving and strengthening nationally integrated geospatial information management capacities, and activities in the six participating Member States of the project. The onset of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic made it necessary to pivot to virtual modalities and substantive support, and for subject matter expertise to be provided virtually to sustain efforts and progress towards the activities of the participating Member States. In that regard, the pandemic reinforced the need for agile, adaptive and responsible geospatial information that is nationally integrated. Reliable and high-quality integrated geospatial data must be available and accessible in order for Member States to respond in an adequate and timely manner to any emerging crisis, whether related to public health or the environment.

Specific dedicated resource contributions were also provided to the Statistics Division as the secretariat for the Committee of Experts. The Cadastre, Land Registry and Mapping Agency of the Netherlands (Kadaster) and the Mapping, Cadastral and Land Registration Authority of Sweden (Lantmäteriet) each virtually seconded a staff member to support agreed items of the work programme of the Committee. The virtual secondments represent a significant and substantive collaboration between Kadaster, Lantmäteriet and the Secretariat, and tangible contributions by the Governments of the Netherlands and of Sweden to the work programme of the Committee. The report also serves to inform the Committee of collaborative activities (including resources) carried out with the private sector and philanthropic organizations to improve and strengthen national geospatial information management in participating Member States, in particular developing countries.

This present report also informs the Committee of Experts of the process and outcome for bidding to host the second United Nations World Geospatial Information Congress, scheduled to be convened in 2022. Equally sound bids were submitted by the Governments of China and India, both of which took into consideration the importance, significance and responsibility associated with the distinction of hosting the second Congress. In order to arrive at an objective decision, the expanded Bureau applied an inclusive evaluation framework to arrive at an objective decision, ultimately awarding the hosting of the second Congress to India.

The Economic and Social Council, in adopting resolution [2016/27](#), requested the Committee of Experts to report back to the Council within five years on the implementation of the resolution, as well as on efforts to work with the Statistical Commission and the entire United Nations system and to integrate geospatial and statistical information systems and, in this context, examine the strengthening

of the institutional arrangements of the Committee. In the report, the Committee demonstrates that it has proved to be an effective, productive and relevant intergovernmental mechanism that successfully promotes international cooperation on global geospatial information management. The Committee has implemented the resolution and operated effectively in line with the mandate from the Council and with the available resources.

However, much more could and should be done, especially to support countries in implementing the technical recommendations of the UN-GGIM Committee and, thus, strengthen their geospatial information management capabilities. Therefore, in the forward looking part of the present report, the expanded Bureau and the Secretariat discuss the main elements of the proposed draft report of the Committee of Experts to be submitted to the Economic and Social Council, as requested in Council resolution [2016/27](#). The draft report will serve not only to review the Committee's implementation of the resolution and major accomplishments, but also discuss the value proposition and benefits to the Member States, including over the next 5 to 10 years, and examine a number of feasible options for strengthening the institutional arrangements of the Committee.

I. Introduction

1. In July 2016 and following a comprehensive review of the Committee of Experts¹, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) adopted resolution [2016/27](#) entitled 'Strengthening institutional arrangements on geospatial information management'. This resolution acknowledges the considerable achievements of the Committee over its first five years, including its contribution to the strengthening of geospatial information management capacities and utilization, especially in developing countries. Recognizing that the Committee of Experts was well placed to continue to contribute to the work of the United Nations, ECOSOC further decided to broaden and strengthen the mandate of the Committee as the relevant body on geospatial information consisting of government experts.

2. Noting the increasing role and relevance of the Committee of Experts and its acknowledged efforts in streamlining the subsidiary bodies of the Council on geospatial information management, ECOSOC requested that the Committee report back within five years on the implementation of resolution [2016/27](#), and to examine the strengthening of the institutional arrangements of the Committee. Over the past several years, under this dedicated agenda item, led by its expanded Bureau, the Committee of Experts has continued to capture and discuss key elements of the Committee's work on strengthening geospatial information management on an annual basis, in preparation for reporting back to ECOSOC.

3. At its tenth session, held virtually on 26 and 27 August and 4 September 2020, the Committee of Experts, in adopting decision 10/101, recognized the considerable efforts of the Secretariat and the expanded Bureau of the Committee in continuing to take strategic and practical action to strengthen geospatial information management and related interlinkages for Member States, in line with the broadened mandate of the Committee pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution [2016/27](#). The Committee also noted the efforts made to improve and strengthen national geospatial information capacity-building activities in developing countries, to ensure that extrabudgetary resources were made available through several funding options and mechanisms and to scale up efforts in that regard to avoid widening the geospatial digital divide.

4. Further, in making decision 10/101 at its tenth session, the Committee of Experts acknowledged that the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework (IGIF) was the culmination of the broad programme of work carried out over the past 10 years, not only as evidence of the achievements of the Committee to date but as a means of enabling Member States to integrate and strengthen their national geospatial information management arrangements according to their national circumstances. The Committee also acknowledged that, when coupled with a strong portfolio of outputs from the broader programme of the Committee, the IGIF provided a strong foundation for reporting back to the Council in 2021. In addition, in adopting decision 10/103, the Committee noted the global significance of the IGIF, which served as a key umbrella for the many activities under the purview of the Committee.

5. This present report informs the Committee of Experts of efforts by the expanded Bureau and Secretariat to take practical and strategic actions to implement resolution [2016/27](#) and serves to highlight specific initiatives aimed at improving and strengthening geospatial information management in Member States. In addition, the expanded Bureau and the Secretariat discuss the main elements of the proposed draft report of the Committee

¹ Programme review of the work of the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management, E/2016/47. <https://undocs.org/E/2016/47>

of Experts to be submitted to ECOSOC, as requested in Council resolution [2016/27](#). The draft report will serve to review the Committee's implementation of the resolution and major accomplishments, discuss the value proposition and benefits to the Member States, including over the next 5 to 10 years, and examine a number of feasible options for strengthening the institutional arrangements of the Committee.

6. The Committee of Experts is invited to take note of the report and to express its views on the way forward for strengthening geospatial information management. Points for discussion and decision are provided in paragraph 63.

II. Strengthening the global coordination and coherence of geospatial information management

Funding and Contributions

7. In adopting resolution [2016/27](#), ECOSOC stressed the need to strengthen the coordination and coherence of global geospatial information management in capacity-building, norm-setting, data collection, data dissemination and data sharing, among others, through appropriate coordination mechanisms. This includes strengthening capacity-building in geospatial information and relevant statistical integration, especially in developing countries. The Council has further recognized that sustainable funding and support, particularly for the operations of the Committee that focus on the SDGs, is needed to strengthen and ensure the continued progress and effectiveness of the Committee.

8. Through resolution [2016/27](#), ECOSOC specifically encouraged Member States to provide voluntary contributions, and otherwise requested the Secretary-General to try to mobilize extra budgetary resources, including through the means of trust funds and other sources, as appropriate, and encouraged Member States to consider expert secondments, to support the activities of the Committee. It was further intended that such additional resources extend to covering the cost of participation in the annual Committee sessions by developing countries, and to ensure full and effective participation of countries in special situations.

9. Previous reports to the Committee in August 2019² and August 2020³ detailed the extent of funding and contributions, all as extra budgetary resources, to support the activities of the Committee of Experts. Specifically, these included: the second China Trust Fund for a further five years, from 2018-2022, to continue to improve and strengthen national geospatial information management, systems and capacities in China and other developing countries; the 11th tranche of the Development Account, a capacity development programme of the United Nations Secretariat, from 2018-2021, aimed at enhancing the capacities of developing countries towards implementing the 2030 Agenda through the implementation of the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework (IGIF); and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Sub-fund of the United Nations Trust Fund for Peace and Development, a limited (November 2018-November 2019) extra budgetary resource which enabled crucial capacity-development consultations and workshops in the development of the Implementation Guide of the IGIF. No further extra budgetary resources have been realized during this intersessional period.

² E/C.20/2020/4/Add.1: http://ggim.un.org/meetings/GGIM-committee/9th-Session/documents/E-C.20-2020-4-Add_1_Strengthening_Geospatial_Information_Report_31July2019.pdf

³ E/C.20/2020/23/Add.1: https://ggim.un.org/meetings/GGIM-committee/10th-Session/documents/E-C.20-2020-23-Add_1-Strengthening-Geospatial-Information-3Aug2020.pdf

10. The onset of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic curtailed travels and postponed a series of planned regional, sub-regional and country-level capacity development activities and events under the 11th tranche of the Development Account Project. This made it necessary to pivot to virtual modalities and substantive support, including for subject matter expertise to be provided virtually to sustain efforts and progress towards strengthening the nationally integrated geospatial information management activities of the participating Member States. In that regard, the pandemic reinforced the need for agile, adaptive, and responsible geospatial information that is nationally integrated. Reliable and high-quality integrated geospatial data must be available and accessible for Member States to respond in an adequate and timely manner to any emerging crisis, whether related to public health or the environment. To continue the support to the six target countries, resources were re-purposed to remotely deliver the needed guidance and support to allow each country to undertake and complete the assessment and analysis of their national circumstances, and to begin their design and development of their IGIF country-level Action Plans.

11. For the first time, during the intersessional period Member States responded to the 2016 request from ECOSOC to provide expert secondments to support the activities of the Committee of Experts. The Cadastre, Land Registry and Mapping Agency of the Netherlands (Kadaster) and the Mapping, Cadastral and Land Registration Authority of Sweden (Lantmäteriet) each virtually seconded a staff member to support the Secretariat in delivering critical agreed items of the work programme of the Committee – these being the establishment of the High-level Group of the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework (HLG-IGIF), implementation of the IGIF and the Framework for Effective Land Administration (FELA), and the preparation of key background elements of the proposed report of the Committee of Experts to be submitted to ECOSOC. The virtual secondments represent a significant and substantive collaboration between Kadaster, Lantmäteriet and the Secretariat, and tangible contributions by the Governments of the Netherlands and of Sweden to the work programme of the Committee.

12. In this regard, it must be acknowledged that several Member States, including the Chairs or co-Chairs of UN-GGIM functional groups volunteer critical resources from within their own organizations or agencies to support the work and activities of the Committee of Experts. This is particularly evident when completing a substantive body of work such as the development of frameworks, guides, compendiums, and papers. Although these may be viewed as expected, nonetheless, it represents additional valuable in-kind contribution to the work programme of the Committee.

13. Announced during the eighth session of the Committee of Experts in August 2018, the World Geospatial Industry Council (WGIC) is an association of companies representing the ecosystem of the geospatial industry, and endeavors to enhance the role of the geospatial industry and strengthen its contribution in the global economy and society. In April 2019, the WGIC and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), as Secretariat for the Committee of Experts, signed a letter of collaboration to ‘develop and strengthen the global geospatial information ecosystem’. Common objectives included working together to create joint programs and projects to develop geospatial knowledge networks and human resource capacities, and to promote the value and utility of geospatial information and technologies for sustainable development.

14. In May 2021, as part of its contribution to the work of the Committee of Experts, the WGIC agreed to support the Secretariat with a global geospatial expert to engage the leadership of UN-GGIM: Africa and supported by the Secretariat in the Economic Commission for Africa, to promote the implementation of the IGIF⁴ within the context of a ‘sub-regional collective modality’⁵ for Africa. This approach will allow country experts to collectively assess common national circumstances to design and develop country-level action plans. The desired outcome is to assist UN-GGIM: Africa further in their efforts to embrace the IGIF as a means for strengthening national capacities to effectively manage the geospatial resources to modernize national geospatial information arrangements in the Member States of Africa.

15. On 15 July 2021, on the margins of the United Nations High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Esri, the PVBLIC Foundation, and UNSD, as Secretariat for the Committee of Experts, announced the SDG Data Alliance.^{6,7} Based on the foundational principle of reducing inequalities of all kinds, the Alliance will empower governments, businesses, and people to respond to and manage shared global challenges like poverty, inequality, and climate change.

16. Using the power of purpose-driven collaboration, the globally recognized geospatial framework of the IGIF, and leading GIS technology, the SDG Data Alliance’s technology, expertise, and financial support will accelerate achievement of the SDGs by creating a targeted 17+ SDG Data Hubs across nations in need in Latin America, Asia, Africa and Europe. Based on geospatial frameworks and technology, these data hubs will assist countries to measure, monitor, and report on the SDGs in a geographic context, and support the ability to collect, analyze, and share the data, particularly focused on reducing inequality (SDG 10). The SDG Data Alliance will serve as a mechanism for countries to acquire resources to conduct and implement the IGIF through the provision of training opportunities and technological capacity building.

Contribution to ECOSOC’s annual meeting of its subsidiary bodies and the High-Level Political Forum

17. The annual meeting of ECOSOC with the chairs of its functional commissions and expert bodies, and the high-level political forum (HLPF) on SDGs follow-up and review, are two mechanisms which are used by the United Nations to encourage other multilateral processes, agencies, and entities to participate and present the alignment of their work with the key thematic areas of ECOSOC. For the 2021 session of the Council and the 2021 HLPF, the theme was ‘Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development’.

⁴ Developed, piloted, and implemented by the UN-GGIM Secretariat under its Development Account 11th tranche Project

⁵ A collective modality of African Member State groupings that recognizes and leverages existing sub-regional and linguistic realities and common peer-to-peer learning capabilities and expertise.

⁶ <https://alliance.sdg.org/>

⁷ <https://media.un.org/asset/k11/k118a86ej2>

18. The joint meeting of ECOSOC with the chairs of its functional commissions and expert bodies was convened virtually on 1 February 2021⁸ and attended by the co-Chair of UN-GGIM from Belgium and the UN-GGIM Secretariat. In her statement⁹, the co-Chair of UN-GGIM: explained what we mean by ‘geospatial information’; its role in the UN system; globally adopted frameworks that support the geospatial enablement of the SDGs; the ways in which the Committee of Experts was able to shift its focus to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; described key impediments as to why critical data cannot be readily accessed, shared and, more importantly, integrated with other data for decision-making; and shared the new opportunities for countries to strengthen their geospatial capabilities and achieve a more comprehensive, sustainable and integrated approach through the implementation of the strategic frameworks and methodologies that have been developed by the Committee of Experts.

19. The Summary Report¹⁰ of the joint meeting highlighted the importance of quality data and digital technologies and the role of the Committee of Experts in this process, and concluded with six main takeaways and recommendations, some of which addressed the desire to foster an integrated and inclusive approach to building back better and leaving no one behind, ECOSOC’s coordinating role is a powerful instrument to enhance collaboration and unlock synergies, and cooperation with other bodies within and outside the UN system is important.

20. The Committee of Experts was invited by ECOSOC to provide substantive inputs into the thematic review of the HLPF on Sustainable Development. ECOSOC noted that the contribution could showcase the views and guidance of the Committee on those aspects of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the various measures and types of international cooperation that can control the pandemic and its impacts and put the world back on track to achieve the SDGs by 2030, within the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development. In March 2021, the co-Chairs of UN-GGIM submitted their contribution to the thematic review of the 2021 HLPF¹¹, which is available on the SDGs Knowledge Platform. The contribution was anchored by the series of regional COVID-19 virtual seminars convened by the Committee of Experts to explore the influence and impact of the geospatial data ecosystem to the pandemic. The seminars and associated case studies highlighted many common and persistent issues, all of which were elaborated further within the white paper, ‘COVID19: Ready to Respond’, prepared by the Committee of Experts for its tenth session in August 2020.¹²

21. As a final part of the preparatory process for the Integration Segment of the HLPF, the Committee of Experts was also invited to participate in ECOSOC’s three Integration Dialogues in late May – early June 2021. The objective of the dialogues was to provide an opportunity to identify the key policy options to inform deliberations at the Integration Segment, and critical guidance on integration policies that should be implemented. The dialogues focused on identifying the most creative ideas emanating from the work of the Council’s subsidiary bodies and the UN system to continue facing and recover better from COVID-19. Dialogue 1 examined institutional strengthening, governance, inclusion and the rule of law (27 May); Dialogue 2 addressed building back better towards inclusive, sustainable, and just economies for recovery: Re-designing the contract between people

⁸ [Joint meeting of the Economic and Social Council with the Chairs of Functional Commissions and Expert Bodies | 75th Economic and Social Council](#)

⁹ [Microsoft Word - UN-GGIM ECOSOC Briefing Notes 1Feb2021](#)

¹⁰ [Microsoft Word - Summary - Joint Chairs of Subsidiary Bodies \(un.org\)](#)

¹¹ [United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management \(UN-GGIM\): Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform](#)

¹² https://ggim.un.org/meetings/GGIM-committee/10th-Session/documents/Covid-19_Ready-to-Respond.pdf

and planet (3 June); and Dialogue 3, focused on human well-being and capabilities: Building back more resilient, healthy, equitable and sustainable societies (10 June).

22. The co-Chairs of the Committee of Experts were invited to specifically participate as a panellist for Dialogue 3. Given the relative time zone to New York, the co-Chair from Belgium represented the Committee of Experts, and described how the COVID-19 pandemic, as a global disaster, had reinforced the applicability of the IGIF as an overarching Framework for all countries. In this case, in the role and contribution of geospatial data, technologies, and tools to deliver timely and reliable information for public health and safety in a systematic way across countries and regions. Geospatial information provides the ‘glue’ to bring these many elements together and anchored by location. This is most pertinent in developing countries, which for too long have been left behind. We now have the technology, tools, and methods to bring data in all its forms together to understand ‘*where*’ things are happening, to bridge the geospatial digital divide, and to build back more resilient, healthy, equitable and sustainable societies.

III. UN-GGIM Expanded Bureau Meeting

23. The only meeting of the UN-GGIM expanded Bureau, the eighth meeting, was convened virtually for two hours on 11 March 2021. Given the time constraints of a virtual meeting, the regional committees and thematic groups of UN-GGIM, as well as the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), submitted short Information Briefs in advance of the meeting (and which are posted on the expanded Bureau’s website). This proved to be a valuable means to share information, and it was agreed that this could be a modality for future expanded Bureau meetings.

24. The meeting provided the opportunity to review the outcomes of the tenth session of the Committee of Experts, and for the Secretariat to consult with the expanded Bureau on the preparations and modalities for this present tenth session of the Committee, including options for, and implications of, convening a scaled down virtual meeting once again. Given the global ‘unknown’ situation with the COVID-19 pandemic, vaccine rollouts, and international travel, there are concerns that an in-person meeting at UN Headquarters in August may, sadly, prove to be unrealistic. Therefore, alternate dates for the eleventh session were discussed and considered; these being 23, 24 and 27 August 2021. The planning and alternate dates were welcomed by the expanded Bureau and noted as a pragmatic option given a final decision could not be taken at that time.

25. The expanded Bureau reviewed the progress of ongoing work of the Committee of Experts, including the numerous global consultations underway, and the work of the Committee’s Subcommittee, Expert Groups and Working Groups. Numerous other key items were also discussed, the details of which will not be discussed here, as they are captured and elaborated further in subsequent sections of this report, and other reports before the Committee at this eleventh session. These items included: the establishment and first meeting of the High-level Group of the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework (HLG-IGIF); the status of the United Nations geospatial and geodesy centres in Deqing, China and Bonn, Germany respectively; an update on the 2021 session of UNGEGN; hosting of the Second United Nations World Geospatial Information Congress UNWGIC); virtual staff secondments to the Secretariat from Member States; and preparations to report to ECOSOC on the implementation of resolution 2016/27 ‘Strengthening institutional arrangements on geospatial information management’. The full report of the UN-GGIM expanded Bureau meeting is available on the Bureau web page.¹³

¹³ http://ggim.un.org/meetings/Bureau_Meetings/Report-Expanded-Bureau%20Meeting-11Jun2020.pdf

IV. Second United Nations World Geospatial Information Congress

26. At its seventh meeting, held virtually on 14 May 2020, the UN-GGIM expanded Bureau agreed to a formal process and timeline for seeking expressions of interest for hosting the Second United Nations World Geospatial Information Congress (UNWGIC) in 2022. This was based on the expanded Bureau's desire to make available an open mechanism offering opportunities for countries to express interest and to host the Congress. In July 2020 the Secretariat initiated a call to Member States for expressions of interest through the national ministry or agency responsible for geospatial information management, to host the Second UNWGIC.

27. At its tenth session, held virtually on 26 and 27 August and 4 September 2020, the Committee of Experts, in adopting decision 10/101, noted the progress by the expanded Bureau and the Secretariat in commencing work on the modalities and timeline, including seeking expressions of interest, for the hosting of the Second UNWGIC. By the end of October 2020, through several detailed submission proposals and processes, the Secretariat had received two final detailed bids for further consideration and final decision by the expanded Bureau. These bids were from the People's Republic of China and India.

28. Through a series of closed meetings, convened from 17 February to 17 March 2021, the expanded Bureau applied a rigorous evaluation criteria and assessment framework to assist in the evaluation of the bids. To ensure the assessment was fair and transparent, and to seek clarifications and address any outstanding questions, both bidders were invited to separately present their proposals to the expanded Bureau and to respond to several, previously notified, questions.

29. In determining the outcome of the process, the expanded Bureau were in full agreement that the proposals provided by China and India were very well prepared and characterized by two qualified and motivated candidates who had considered at length the importance, significance and responsibility associated with the distinction of hosting the Second UNWGIC. Both bids were valid and equivalent in many of the evaluation aspects of the required criteria. Therefore, the expanded Bureau were left in no doubt that either China or India, with extremely strong bids and preparatory work, could successfully host the Congress and place it even more firmly on the world geospatial stage.

30. However, there was one main differentiating point that the expanded Bureau considered, and which ultimately tipped the balance in making its final decision to accept the offer from India to host the Second UNWGIC. This was the United Nation's mantra to ensure and share geographic diversity among countries. China had previously, and very successfully, hosted the First UNWGIC in November 2018, launching the global relevance of the Congress. Given that the Congress is now the default 'Olympics' of the global geospatial community, it was agreed that the UNWGIC would be even better placed if it travelled to different locations around the world – moving from one country to another – to encourage diversity among countries, and to ensure a greater voice and expanded dimension in a broader community. At the same time, this would allow for more countries to become champions and leaders in support of UN-GGIM and the global geospatial agenda.

31. The Second UNWGIC, with the tentative theme 'Geo-Enabling the Global Village: No One Should be Left Behind', is being planned to take place during the week of **10-14 October 2022** at the Hyderabad International Convention Centre in Hyderabad, India, and hosted by the Government of India through its Ministry of Science and Technology. The Second UNWGIC is expected to allow about 2,000 participants to gather in a participatory

and inclusive environment to enhance the communication, understanding, knowledge and application of geospatial information management for the betterment of global development and to leave no one behind.

V. Strengthening the interlinkages among the global geospatial information community

Global Geospatial Knowledge and Innovation Centre, Deqing, China

32. At its ninth session, held in New York from 7 to 9 August 2019, the Committee of Experts adopted decision 9/101, in which it welcomed the efforts of the United Nations and the Government of China in developing a proposal to jointly advance the establishment, led by the United Nations, of a global geospatial knowledge and innovation centre in Deqing, China, providing opportunities to build global geospatial capacity and capability and to improve and strengthen expertise on how to prepare for national geospatial information management arrangements in countries, especially developing countries.

33. At its tenth session, held virtually on 26 and 27 August and 4 September 2020, the Committee of Experts adopted decision 10/101, in which it supported the continuing efforts of the United Nations and the Government of China towards the establishment of a global geospatial knowledge and innovation centre in Deqing, China, which would provide opportunities to build and expand global geospatial capacity, competence and capability and strengthen geospatial information management arrangements in countries, especially developing countries;

34. During the intersessional period there has been substantial progress towards establishing the United Nations Global Geospatial Knowledge and Innovation Centre (UN-GGKIC) in Deqing, China. Following a series of collaborative and productive consultations on the operationalization of the Centre, the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), as the UN-GGIM Secretariat, in collaboration with the Government of China, through the Ministry of Natural Resources, has now completed the formal negotiation on the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that will contain all the provisions regarding the operationalization of the Centre. The formal negotiations on the Host Country Agreement are almost concluded.

35. In accordance with the MoU on the operationalization of the Centre, an International Advisory Committee (IAC) will provide the required programme governance and oversight of the Centre. The IAC is now being established, with an initial composition comprising international geospatial experts with balanced geographical representation and diversity from UN-GGIM, to provide the required guidance and advice on the development, implementation, and review of the substantive annual programme of work of the Centre.

36. A Welcome Meeting of the UN-GGKIC was convened on 24 May 2021 in Deqing, China, and attended by the UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Mr. Liu Zhenmin and UN Resident Coordinator to China Mr. Siddharth Chatterjee with counterparts from Chinese agencies, all of whom made insightful welcome statements. The Welcome Meeting also provided the opportunity to virtually bring together, for the first time, 14 members of the Centre's IAC. During the meeting, each of the IAC members provided their initial expectations and hopes for the UN-GGKIC, and its critical role in strengthening and advancing the geospatial information management capacity and capabilities of Member States, especially developing countries, and to strengthen knowledge sharing and innovative cooperation.

Global Geodetic Centre of Excellence, Bonn, Germany

37. At its tenth session, held virtually on 26 and 27 August and 4 September 2020, the Committee of Experts adopted decision 10/104, in which it welcomed and supported the offer by Germany to establish and host a Global Geodetic Centre of Excellence (GGCE) at the United Nations campus in Bonn, Germany, as the first Centre of an envisioned federated approach to enhance global cooperation and coordination among Member States and relevant geodetic stakeholders, strengthen geodetic infrastructure and support Member States in improving their national contributions towards the sustainability and quality of the global geodetic reference frame, and advance the implementation of General Assembly resolution [69/266](#) on a global geodetic reference frame for sustainable development.

38. During the intersessional period UNSD, as the UN-GGIM Secretariat, in collaboration with the Government of Germany, through the Federal Agency for Cartography and Geodesy (BKG), have progressed formal negotiations towards the establishment of the GGCE, the modalities of which are detailed in a separate report (E/C.20/2021/7/Add.1) to this eleventh session of the Committee of Experts.

VI. Strengthening institutional arrangements on global geospatial information management

39. The global importance of geospatial information was recognized by the United Nations in July 2011 when ECOSOC, acknowledging the urgent need to take concrete action to strengthen international cooperation in global geospatial information management, established the Committee of Experts. In making decision [2011/24](#), ECOSOC stipulated that the Committee of Experts be (at least initially) “established and administered within existing resources and organized accordingly” and requested it to submit to the Council in 2016 “a comprehensive review of all aspects of its work and operations, in order to allow Member States to assess its effectiveness”.

40. In July 2016, and following the comprehensive review of its work, the mandate of the Committee of Experts was considerably strengthened with the adoption of ECOSOC resolution [2016/27](#) ‘Strengthening institutional arrangements on geospatial information management’. The resolution recognized: the considerable achievements and progress made by the Committee; its contribution to the strengthening of geospatial information management capacities and utilization in developing countries; the efforts to streamline the work of four subsidiary bodies of ECOSOC in the field of geospatial information management; that the Committee of Experts was well placed to continue to contribute to the work of the United Nations; the need to strengthen the coordination and coherence of global geospatial information management, in capacity-building, norm-setting, data collection, data dissemination and data sharing, among others; and the importance of strengthening capacity-building in the area of geospatial information management and relevant statistical integration, especially in developing countries.

41. Resolution [2016/27](#) anchored the Committee of Experts firmly as a subsidiary body of ECOSOC, and noted that sustainable funding and support, particularly for the operations of the Committee that focus on the SDGs is needed to strengthen and ensure the continued effectiveness of the Committee. Although with increased mandate, and more opportunity for the Committee to contribute to the work of the United Nations and in support of Member States, no additional regular budget resources were provided. However, noting the increasing role and relevance of the Committee of Experts, ECOSOC requested that the Committee report back to the Council, no later than in five years’ time, on the implementation of the resolution, and to examine the strengthening of the institutional arrangements of the Committee.

42. With the experience of the 2016 resolution process to reflect upon, with a view towards the future, and with strong support from the UN-GGIM expanded Bureau, the Secretariat has reported to the Committee of Experts on an annual basis since August 2017 under this standing agenda item ‘Strengthening geospatial information management’. This reporting has emphasized the continuing efforts to take strategic and practical actions to strengthen geospatial information management and related interlinkages for Member States, in line with the broadened mandate of the Committee pursuant to ECOSOC resolution [2016/27](#). Through this engagement and process, the Secretariat has been uniquely positioned to support Member States in a most constructive and pro-active manner to sustain and advance the United Nations agenda and the increasingly growing programme of work on global geospatial information management.

43. Now, after more than a decade of existence and anchored by eleven annual intergovernmental sessions with a fully functioning global architecture, it is upon the Committee of Experts to report back once again to ECOSOC, “on the implementation of resolution [2016/27](#) as well as on its continued efforts to work with the Statistical Commission and with the entire United Nations system, and to integrate geospatial and statistical information systems and, in this context, to examine the strengthening of the institutional arrangements of the Committee.”

44. But what should this report and ‘examination’ entail? As this eleventh session is convened, the Committee of Experts is now globally recognized by Member States and the global geospatial community as an effective, productive, and successful intergovernmental mechanism of the United Nations. An intergovernmental mechanism consistently and ably affording a forum for coordination and dialogue among Member States, and between Member States and relevant international organizations. Such recognition extends into key geospatial stakeholders, the academia, industry, private sector, and international geospatial societies.

45. There is a growing pressure on countries to provide integrated geospatial information, in no-small part due to the exigencies of COVID-19, but also the 2030 Agenda and national development priorities. There is no question that the ‘UN-GGIM apparatus’ is effective and delivering, through its regional committees and stakeholders’ architecture and partnerships, as well as through several in-country initiatives and capacity development programmes. However, providing a report that is technical and demonstrates ‘what UN-GGIM has achieved’ may not be the solution for the needed strengthening of the institutional arrangements and the commensurate resource allocation. This approach taken in 2016 did not achieve the desired outcome.

46. As evidenced the various reports submitted at this session, Member States are observing the critical importance of the Committee’s work which even if partially applied, or applied in the depths of a global pandemic, still lead to positive outcomes. The role of geospatial information as an integrative influence, through the efforts of UN-GGIM, is now beyond question. However, the question of the road not yet taken remains. Had the Committee of Experts been adequately resourced, would the global and national responses to the challenges in front us have led to markedly different outcomes?

Reporting back to ECOSOC

47. As mentioned briefly in paragraph 25 of this report, at its eighth meeting on 11 March 2021, the UN-GGIM expanded Bureau discussed the preparations to report back to ECOSOC on the implementation of resolution [2016/27](#), including the timing for the submission of the report and the elements it may contain. It was acknowledged that this process should be carefully considered, given that it is a significant undertaking with potentially significant consequences. There was an immediate understanding that the

Member States on the expanded Bureau should provide leadership and that the UN-GGIM geospatial professionals at their respective capitals will need to engage with their diplomats, especially ECOSOC representatives, much more than they did in 2016.

48. Additionally, the Chairs of each of the five Regional Committees of UN-GGIM observed that they have a role to play in this important process and stand ready to reach out to Member States in their regions to rally the needed political support. To assist, it was agreed by the expanded Bureau that an initial communication/information Briefing Note be developed and provided to the Chairs of the Regional Committees for consistent and informed messaging, and to provide context for the ECOSOC – UN-GGIM interface and journey over the past decade.

49. While just a concept and ‘yet to be established and proven’ in 2011, the undeniable fact is that a decade later UN-GGIM is now indispensable. The global geospatial landscape, including its greater understanding and awareness, has grown significantly because of the Committee of Experts. This reflects the considerable efforts and ownership that Member States, at the expert and technical level, have invested into the activities and ongoing programme of work of the Committee of Experts. Why have they done this? It is because they have recognized the importance, benefits, and value of this collective work, and the very effective and efficient forum the Committee provides for anchoring the coordination and dialogue among all Member States and between Member States and relevant international organizations. For many developing countries, this is critical. The Committee of Experts has created the global intersect for harnessing and nurturing geospatial governance, enabling technology, innovation, people and processes.

50. The problem is that, while the expanded mandates provided to the Committee by ECOSOC in 2016 are compelling, no additional regular budget resources were provided to implement the mandates. Yet, the Committee of Experts has continued to deliver. ECOSOC knows well what UN-GGIM has achieved – it is a matter of record – and that these achievements have been delivered with very limited resources. But the breadth, depth and complexity of the UN-GGIM ‘consolidated implementation’ apparatus is now very different to the first years, when establishing an identity, modalities and architecture for UN-GGIM was the norm. The growing programme of work and limited resources has meant the Secretariat services are showing signs of structural stress in keeping all the many moving parts of UN-GGIM together.

51. Despite all its benefits and successes, the Committee of Experts, as a fully functioning and mature subsidiary body of ECOSOC, and with full expectation that it continues to be sustainable in the future, continues to rely on the same limited existing resources and structure that was imposed by ECOSOC in 2011, and again in 2016. Continuing in the same, largely unchanged, manner in 2021 and beyond is not sustainable to meet the needs of ECOSOC’s agenda and the growing programme of work of the Committee of Experts. In this Decade of Action for the SDGs, building back better towards a sustainable and resilient recovery from the pandemic, and assisting vulnerable countries in need, the Committee’s work is more important than ever before. But it is under-resourced with no ‘structural funding’ available to ensure its coordination and coherence. A more strategic view and vision of where the Committee stands now and where it should be in the future, and focusing on the value proposition and necessary resources, is now needed.

52. Following several informal consultations with the Bureau and a group of key and concerned representatives of Member States, a Draft Briefing Note titled ‘Strengthening Institutional Arrangements on Geospatial Information Management’ was circulated among

this Bureau and the group of representatives of Member States on 18 June 2021¹⁴. In addition to being a communication/information mechanism, the Briefing Note could be considered and refined as an ongoing and dynamic discussion document to determine and agree upon general ideas/goals/objectives to jointly develop the key points for a ‘battle plan’ and the main messages of the Committee’s value proposition in its report back to ECOSOC.

53. The Draft Briefing Note is provided as a background document to this report and provides the reference and context for the remaining discussion on this topic in the present report. With this Draft Briefing Note available, the group of representatives of Member States, as ‘friends of the co-Chairs of UN-GGIM’ and representing a diverse geographic mix, convened a virtual meeting on 7 July 2021 to discuss and ‘brainstorm’ the annexed Draft Briefing Note. The idea being to discuss the main elements of the report and to begin to elaborate the key points to consider in the reporting process for ECOSOC. This is to support the Committee as it determines how to strengthen the institutional arrangements of the Committee of Experts, and what the Committee may look like looking ahead over the next five to ten years.

54. This ‘friends of the co-Chairs’ group first considered when the Committee may report back to ECOSOC, noting that the Council operates on a July-to-July calendar, with the 2021 session of ECOSOC concluding at the end of July 2021. Recognizing this timing, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and the many virtual meetings taking place, the group concurred with the expanded Bureau’s earlier view (meeting in March 2021) that there is no immediate urgency or pressure from the Council for the Committee of Experts to have submitted its report by July 2021. Another dimension considered was that in its current 2021 session, ECOSOC is very pre-occupied, as is expected, with focussing on the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.

55. The group next considered the structure of the Committee’s report to ECOSOC, which could comprise a 3-part process: a review of achievements; demonstrating the value proposition; and future institutional arrangements. In essence the why, what and how of the Committee of Experts.

- (a) **Reviewing achievements** will not be difficult, as much has been achieved over the past five years by the Committee. However, reviewing these achievements should also not be the main emphasis/priority of the report. Not so much what the Committee has done, rather what it can and intends to do in the future. Overstating the Committee’s achievements could be detrimental, as ECOSOC, as it did in 2016, could then suggest that if the Committee has delivered so many outcomes in the past five years, and with such limited resources, the Committee of Experts can just continue doing so within existing resources. Therefore, attention should be given to addressing the gaps, the needs which the Committee has not yet been able to address, including opportunities that are important to the needs of ECOSOC. The intention has to be to focus on what can be achieved in the future, the next five to ten years with appropriate resources – and why. For example, with adequate resources the Committee can do much more ‘implementation’ and ‘scaling’ of geospatial capability, greater geospatial-statistical integration, building capacity in key areas of work, fundamental data needs, integrating more across the UN system, including the statistical and geographic names communities, emerging technologies, closing the geospatial digital divide, greater Member State engagement, etc. All these are framed by the urgent needs of the SDGs and the Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs, the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, societal

¹⁴ Australia, Belgium, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Germany, Mexico, Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Slovenia, Sweden, Tonga, United Kingdom, United States.

benefits, oceans, the environment, and the Declaration on the Commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations¹⁵, and to leave no one behind.

- (b) The **value proposition**, what Member States' view as the value and 'benefits' of UN-GGIM today and in the future, including addressing 'opportunities', will be a key pillar to the report. The report must address the gaps and value propositions in simple and appealing diplomatic language, and which relates readily to globally agreed agendas, such as the 2030 Agenda and Decade of Action, the Declaration on the Commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations and the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The value proposition of the Committee will entail what could be done into the future if the resources were available. For example, how does geospatial information assist in addressing our global to local development challenges, perhaps a ten-year vision for Committee, a strategy for what the global IGIF environment will look like for countries, what are the expectations from Member States, and what are the most valuable contributions that the Committee can make to benefit the geospatial community? Reviewing achievements and what can be accomplished in the future will be important in the value proposition. Just as geospatial information is the data integrator, the Committee of Experts is the global integrator – keeping it all together. Bringing the global consensus, benefit and unification of location-based data systems that are integrated and recognizing the special challenges and needs facing the most vulnerable countries.
- (c) **Institutional arrangements**, what these arrangements comprise, and how they are implemented will need to be carefully considered and articulated. What is the structure and the institutional arrangements, the viable options to explore, the rationale, and the strengths and weaknesses to ensure a sustainable future, and one that is appropriately resourced, positioning the Committee to continue to deliver to the benefit of Member States? Options such as regular budget or extra-budgetary resources, and what each of these would entail, and at what quantum, will need to be considered. For example, the budget resources could incrementally include (or omit): resources for DGACM¹⁶, including for conference management and services, interpretation of meetings, and documents editing and translation; dedicated Secretariat staff resources, numbers of which would need to be justified and negotiated; resources to fund experts from developing countries to attend the annual sessions of the Committee of Experts; or resources to fund experts from developing countries to participate in key calendared technical meetings of UN-GGIM.

56. With these initial considerations, the following sequencing was suggested.

- (a) To seek views and guidance on the modalities and main elements of the proposed report to ECOSOC at this eleventh session of the Committee of Experts.
- (b) Thereafter, work towards preparing a final detailed report to be submitted to the 2022 session of ECOSOC in February 2022 for consideration and approval.
- (c) Separately, prepare a draft resolution, to be led by Member States through their Permanent Missions to the United Nations in New York and with multiple co-sponsors, as a follow-up to the report submitted to the Council, and in direct response to resolution [2016/27](#).

¹⁵ <https://undocs.org/A/RES/75/1>

¹⁶ Department of General Assembly and Conference Management: <https://www.un.org/dgacm/en>

It should be noted that, should this sequence be acceptable, ongoing communication and engagement by geospatial experts in capitals with their diplomatic counterparts in Foreign Affairs and Permanent Missions to the United Nations in New York will be critical.

Suggested next steps

57. At this eleventh session, the Committee of Expert is expected to consider and provide its views and guidance on the modalities and main elements of the proposed report to ECOSOC. Following this eleventh session, the Bureau and group of friends of the co-Chairs of UN-GGIM will reconvene to reflect on the views, guidance and outcomes from this eleventh session and to consider next steps towards preparing and supporting the report to ECOSOC and the accompanying resolution.

58. In preparing the report to ECOSOC, tangible contributions to support the Secretariat will be required to ensure that the report and its message communicates accordingly and is able to appeal to the political and diplomatic communities in Member States. The language in the report must not be technical, although the facts remain. Member States could consider volunteering relevant expertise for the writing of this report. In this regard, the Secretariat appreciates the support of the Mapping, Cadastral and Land Registration Authority of Sweden (Lantmäteriet) and the Cadastre, Land Registry and Mapping Agency of the Netherlands (Kadaster) for having virtually seconded a staff member to support aspects of this work.

59. The draft report to ECOSOC will be provided to the Committee of Experts for consideration during the intersessional period. The consultation for this draft report is expected to be carried out towards the end of this year so that the inputs and feedback can be reviewed and considered in preparation of the final detailed report to be submitted to ECOSOC in February 2022. Member States will be requested to promptly review and provide their inputs and feedback as their contributions towards strengthening the institutional arrangements on global geospatial information management.

60. The Committee of Experts may wish to consider the establishment of an ad-hoc task team, comprising the Bureau and some of the friends of the co-Chairs of UN-GGIM, together with any volunteered staff and expert resources, to prepare and write-up the draft report to ECOSOC. This ad-hoc task team would review and consider the inputs and feedback provided in the consultation process and deliver the draft final report to the Bureau and friends of the co-Chairs group with a view to its finalization and submission to ECOSOC in February 2022.

61. The Bureau and the friends of the co-Chairs group will consult and develop the draft resolution for strengthening the institutional arrangements on global geospatial information management for ECOSOC. Led and proposed by Member States, this draft resolution will need to be consulted with Member States through their Permanent Missions to the United Nations in New York. This political and diplomatic process will need to be led and supported by the group of Member States sponsoring the draft ECOSOC resolution.

62. Therefore, and given the time constraints over the coming months, the Committee of Experts is requested to establish an ad-hoc task team as proposed above and entrust the Bureau and the group comprising the friends of the co-Chairs to draft the report and consult with the Committee of Experts before its submission to ECOSOC in early 2022.

VII. Points for discussion

63. The Committee of Experts is invited to:
- (a) Take note of the present report and express its views on the efforts of the expanded Bureau and Secretariat to take strategic and practical actions to strengthen geospatial information management and related interlinkages for Member States;
 - (b) Take note of the efforts to improve and strengthen national geospatial information capacity-building in developing countries, and request Member States for extra-budgetary resources to be made available via several funding options and mechanisms;
 - (c) Take note of the convening of the Second United Nations World Geospatial Information Congress (UNWGIC), planned during the week of 10-14 October 2022, at the Hyderabad International Convention Centre in Hyderabad, India, and hosted by the Government of India through its Ministry of Science and Technology;
 - (d) Express its views on the timeline and preparations for the Committee of Experts to report back to the Economic and Social Council on the implementation of resolution 2016/27, and to examine the strengthening of the institutional arrangements of the Committee;
 - (e) Provide guidance on further practical options and strategies the Committee may need to consider in its preparations to report back to the Economic and Social Council in 2022;
 - (f) Consider the establishment of an ad-hoc task team to prepare and consult on the draft report to ECOSOC, and entrust the Bureau and the friends of the co-Chairs to finalize and submit the report to ECOSOC in February 2022; and
 - (g) Urge geospatial information management experts in Member States to initiate a dialogue with their Foreign Affairs and Permanent Missions to the United Nations in New York to alert and sensitize them to the preparations and nature of the report to the Economic and Social Council in 2022.