UN-GGIM Background Document: Proposal to Establish World Geospatial Day

Background

This background document is provided as a refinement of a proposal submitted to the UN-GGIM Bureau by Fiji in May 2025, outlining the rationale for a United Nations General Assembly resolution to establish a Global Geospatial Information Day, observed every four years on the first Wednesday in August of each leap year, beginning in 2028.

Subsequent to the UN-GGIM Bureau meeting in May, this document now reflects a proposal for a General Assembly resolution to establish a 'World Geospatial Day', observed annually as a dedicated international day in the global United Nations calendar to elevate awareness and understanding of geospatial information and technologies across all sectors and walks of life. This initiative aims to formally acknowledge and recognize the critical and vital role of geospatial information management in advancing and sustaining resilient societies, supporting sustainable environment, driving dynamic digital economies, and improving human well-being.

Geospatial information plays a fundamentally significant role in our modern world, underpinning a wide range of daily activities and decisions. From navigation and urban planning to disaster management and environmental monitoring, and for enhancing convenience and efficiency within a vibrant digital economy, geospatial data and technologies are indispensable. Recognizing the importance of integrated geospatial information management, this proposal is firmly grounded in the principles, aspirations and objectives of key United Nations resolutions that underscore the significance of geospatial information management for global development.

Connecting People, Planet, and Prosperity

Geospatial information is data that is referenced to a location or place, such as geographic coordinates, an address, a building, or even a vehicle travelling along a road, ships at sea, aircraft in flight, and satellites in orbit. It describes the location of 'where' all things are, and provides the digital connection between people, their place, their activities, and their environment. Geospatial information reflects the digital version of our physical world, in which all human, economic and environmental activity takes place. Comprising both data and enabling technologies, geospatial information touches many sectors and thematic areas across the entire development (economic, environmental and social wellbeing) paradigms.

Geospatial information, data linked to specific location, provides the foundational understanding of "where" that is essential for navigating the complexities of our interconnected world. From ancient mapping to modern real-time location services, this knowledge has been central to human progress and is now more critical and vital than ever in addressing global challenges and enhancing a more resilient and sustainable future.

Building Upon Millennia of Knowledge

Geospatial information concepts are deeply rooted in human history. For millennia, humans have relied on spatial understanding for navigation, resource management, territorial claims, and environmental awareness. From early cave paintings and rudimentary maps to the sophisticated cartography and surveying techniques of ancient civilizations, the quest to understand and represent 'where' has been a driving force in human development. This rich history underscores the enduring importance of geospatial information and knowledge.

Tackling global issues and enhancing resilience and sustainability

In the 21st century, integrated geospatial information management is crucial for addressing global challenges, supporting more resilient societies, driving dynamic digital economies, and connecting people, planet and prosperity. Examples include:

- Sustainable Development Goals: Geospatial information is essential for monitoring progress towards the SDGs, identifying spatial inequalities, targeting interventions effectively, and ensuring that 'no one is left behind.' It supports efforts to eradicate poverty, promote food security, improve health and education, and ensure access to clean water and sanitation.
- Developing Resilience to Shocks: Geospatial information is vital for enhancing resilience to a range of shocks and stresses, including climate change impacts, natural disasters, economic disruptions, and pandemics. It supports risk assessment, early warning systems, and the development of adaptive strategies.
- Climate Action: Geospatial information and technologies are critical for understanding climate variabilities and change, and its impacts such as sea-level rise and deforestation, and supporting mitigation and adaptation efforts.
- Sustainable Urbanization: Geospatial information enables sustainable urban planning, infrastructure development, transportation management, and the provision of essential services in rapidly growing cities, contributing to the creation of inclusive, safe, and resilient urban environments.
- Environmental Sustainability: Geospatial technologies are used for monitoring ecosystems, managing natural resources, conserving biodiversity, combating deforestation and illegal wildlife trade, and promoting sustainable land use practices.
- Food Security and Sustainable Agriculture: Geospatial information supports precision agriculture, land management, crop monitoring, yield forecasting, and sustainable agricultural practices, contributing to increased food production and reduced environmental impact.
- Disaster Preparedness and Response: Geospatial information is crucial for disaster preparedness, early warning systems, risk assessment, vulnerability mapping, and effective response and recovery efforts, minimizing the impact of disasters on communities.
- Navigation and Transportation: Powering navigation systems that guides vehicles, ships and aircraft, optimizing logistics, and supporting the development of intelligent transportation systems, enhancing safety and efficiency.
- Scientific Research: Providing essential data for various scientific disciplines, including geography, geology, ecology, and epidemiology.
- Economic Development: Geospatial information supports economic development by facilitating infrastructure planning, resource management, trade, and investment, and by providing insights into market dynamics and spatial patterns of economic activity.
- Social Equity and Inclusion: Geospatial information can be used to identify and address spatial inequalities, promote social inclusion, and ensure equitable access to resources and services.

Introduction

In adopting resolution E/RES/2022/24 entitled 'Enhancing global geospatial information management arrangements', ECOSOC acknowledged, *inter alia*, the achievements and progress made by the Committee of Experts in the area of global geospatial information management and its significant contribution to strengthening geospatial information capacities and utilization in developing countries since the Committee's establishment in 2011. Further, the resolution reiterated the importance of strengthening and enhancing the effectiveness of the Committee going forward, particularly for the achievement of its operations focused on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the United

Nations Integrated Geospatial Information Framework (UN-IGIF), to strengthen and ensure its continued effectiveness and benefit to all Member States.

In February 2015, the General Assembly adopted resolution A/RES/69/266 entitled 'A global geodetic reference frame for sustainable development', also submitted by Fiji. This resolution recognizes the importance of a Global Geodetic Reference Frame (GGRF) as a fundamental infrastructure for geospatial information and Earth sciences. It emphasizes the necessity of international cooperation to support the development and maintenance of the GGRF, which provides the foundation required for the collection, integration, and utilization of all geospatial information.

At its fourteenth session in 2024, the Committee of Experts referenced the critical importance to focus on communicating, promoting, advocating, and raising awareness of the merits, benefits, and potential of geospatial information across multiple thematic areas of the Committee's work, including geodesy, climate resilience, land administration, and the marine environment. The revised UN-GGIM Strategic Framework 2025-2030 further emphasizes the need for strategic engagement, communication and awareness across sectors, and to foster understanding and organizational value.

Communicating awareness and understanding of the value and benefits of geospatial information has been a challenging proposition for the Committee of Experts since its establishment. These challenges continue to resonate across the United Nations system, Member States, industry, academia, and the general community today. As observed in the UN-IGIF Overarching Strategy 'Case for Change', geospatial information is a major contributor to socio-economic transformation in many countries. Yet, there is still a considerable lack of awareness and understanding of the vital and integrative role of geospatial information and related enabling architectures in contributing to national development. This lack of awareness is particularly common at the policy and decision-making levels in developing countries.

Why a World Geospatial Day

Recognizing the pervasive influence of geospatial information, it is essential to elevate public, policy and decision-maker awareness. Celebrating a dedicated World Geospatial Day each year would:

- Raise public and political awareness of the crucial and vital role of geospatial information in developing resilient societies and achieving sustainable development.
- Foster a deeper understanding of the diverse applications and benefits of geospatial information for the betterment of lives and livelihoods.
- Encourage creativity and stimulate innovation and the development of new geospatial technologies, applications, and solutions.
- Facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing among governments, international organizations, academia, the private sector, and civil society.
- Promote investment in geospatial data infrastructures, technologies, and human capacity development, particularly in developing countries, to empower them to leverage geospatial information for their own development priorities.
- Showcase better practices in geospatial information management, data governance, responsible use, and innovative applications of geospatial technologies and services.
- Reinforce the importance of geospatial information in achieving global agendas, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

This initiative is strongly underpinned by the principles and objectives outlined in key United Nations resolutions and mandates within the purview of the UN-GGIM Committee of Experts, which underscore

the critical and vital role of geospatial information management in addressing global challenges and promoting resilient and sustainable national development. The establishment of a World Geospatial Day will directly contribute to the goals and objectives outlined in these resolutions, provide a powerful mechanism for translating their principles into concrete action, and will provide a global platform for taking specific actions on an annual basis.

As a collective responsibility, the success of World Geospatial Day will depend on the active and collective participation of a broad range of actors, including:

- National governments play a central role in developing and implementing geospatial information management policies, infrastructure, and standards, and in promoting the highest and widest use of geospatial information for national development and priorities.
- The United Nations system can integrate the day into their work, promote its observance, and highlight the role of geospatial information management in their respective mandates.
- Regional and international organizations can contribute their expertise, resources, and networks to support the day's observance and promote the role, relevance and significance of geospatial information management for improving lives and livelihoods.
- Universities and research centers are crucial for advancing geospatial knowledge, conducting research, and developing innovative applications, services and solutions.
- The private sector involved in geospatial technologies, data acquisition and provision, and related services can showcase their contributions, innovations, and solutions, and collaborate on initiatives to promote the usefulness of geospatial information.
- Professional federations and associations representing geospatial professionals can organize events, promote awareness within their communities, and contribute to capacity development and knowledge sharing.
- Raising general public awareness and engagement will foster greater understanding and appreciation for the benefits of geospatial information in their daily lives, empowering people and communities to engage with geospatial information management, infrastructures and technologies.

The establishment of a World Geospatial Day, aligned with the principles of resolutions E/RES/2022/24 and A/RES/69/266, would significantly advance the global geospatial information management agenda. It would raise awareness, promote innovation, and foster collaboration, contributing to a more resilient, sustainable and prosperous future for all. A United Nations General Assembly resolution is essential to provide the necessary framework and impetus for this vital initiative.

Establishing World Geospatial Day

At its meeting in May, the UN-GGIM Bureau unanimously supported the proposal to establish a World Geospatial Day and agreed it should be brought to the attention of the Committee of Experts for consideration at this fifteenth session. The Bureau agreed that the purpose of a dedicated international geospatial day is to highlight and raise awareness of the pressing need to advance geospatial information as a transformative digital technology (as per the motivation of the UN-IGIF), so that all governments and economies can generate political understanding, industry momentum, and broad public awareness, while bridging the digital divide.

The Bureau noted that the UN General Assembly has designated specific international days and weeks as occasions to mark particular events or topics in order to promote, through awareness and action, the objectives of the Organization. These have been proclaimed through the adoption of resolutions by the General Assembly proposed by one or more Member States. The list of international days and weeks

currently observed by the United Nations are available here: https://www.un.org/en/observances/list-days-weeks. Relevant examples include World Meteorological Day (23 March), Earth Day (22 April), World Environment Day (5 June), World Statistics Day (20 October), and World Population Day (11 July).

Further, the Bureau identified two additional key points the Committee of Experts may wish to note, including:

Determining a Title: The original proposal by Fiji was to establish a 'Global Geospatial Information Day' and to be observed every four years on the first Wednesday in August of each leap year, beginning in 2028. However, the terminology used by the United Nations is usually 'international' or 'world' day and is typically observed annually. Therefore, the Committee of Experts may wish to adopt the title 'World Geospatial Day' as a day that encapsulates the entire 'geospatial' ecosystem across government and society.

Determining a Day: Ensuring the selected day and date is clear and not conflicting with another international day of celebration will be a requirement. There are multiple options in the global calendar for aligning and celebrating World Geospatial Day, examples include:

- Alignment with annual sessions of UN-GGIM. While this would provide a good moment, there is a risk that the global day of celebration is diluted or overtaken by the Committee session. Additionally, the annual UN-GGIM sessions are not fixed into specific days and move across days and weeks as designated by the yearly calendar around the first week of August.
- Alignment with GIS Day. Initiated by Esri in 1999, GIS Day is an annual event held on the third Wednesday of November, during Geography Awareness Week, to promote the understanding and use of GIS technology. It is a geospatial community awareness initiative with a focus on GIS specifically, but not global geospatial information more broadly. There may be more value in having World Geospatial Day separated from GIS Day, while at the same time reinforcing each other.
- Alignment with the UN-WGIC. This alignment would only occur once every four years but suffers from not being a designated day.
- Alignment with 'quiet' periods in the existing designated days. For example, January and February have fewer international observed days. Of particular note, the days of 22-28 February are completely clear, and are six months separated from the annual UN-GGIM sessions in August. This could provide a valuable rhythm for specific meetings of entities of UN-GGIM to meet (such as the UN-GGIM Bureau and Expanded Bureau) and celebrate World Geospatial Day.

Framed by the proposal from Fiji and the above context, the UN-GGIM Bureau seeks the views and support of the Committee of Experts with a view to endorsing the proposal for a consensus-based draft resolution being prepared to establish World Geospatial Day, under the guidance of the Bureau, for submission to the UN General Assembly at an appropriate time. Appendix 1 provides some initial first concepts for the drafting of the resolution.

APPENDIX 1: Zero Draft Text Towards Establishing World Geospatial Day

The General Assembly,

Recalling the importance of information and data for evidence-based decision-making and sustainable development,

Recognizing the fundamental role of geospatial information in understanding our world, addressing global challenges, and fostering economic, social, and environmental well-being,

Acknowledging the long and rich history of geospatial understanding and representation, dating back to the earliest forms of cartography and spatial reasoning, which have profoundly shaped human civilization and our understanding of the Earth,

Emphasizing the increasing relevance and significance of modern geospatial information management and technologies and location-based services in a wide range of sectors including economic growth, environmental monitoring, public health, and humanitarian action,

Highlighting the potential of geospatial information to empower individuals, communities, businesses and governments with critical insights for informed action and achieving resilience and sustainability,

Recognizing that good and responsible geospatial information management, including data collection, processing, analysis, dissemination, and regulatory considerations, is crucial for maximizing its benefits and addressing potential challenges,

Noting with appreciation the efforts of national governments, international organizations, academic institutions, the private sector, and civil society organizations in advancing the development and application of geospatial information management and technologies,

Noting further that geospatial information is already celebrated through a variety of national and global initiatives and activities, and welcoming their support and willingness to coordinate such events under the auspices of the United Nations,

Considering the need to further raise awareness of the importance of geospatial information among policymakers, the public, and other stakeholders, and to promote its wider adoption and utilization for the betterment of lives and livelihoods, particularly in small and vulnerable countries,

1. Decides to establish World Geospatial Day and designates its annual celebration to be observed on [date] [day] starting in 202X;
2. Invites all Member States, United Nations system, and relevant international and regional organizations, academic institutions, the private sector, civil society, and individuals to observe World Geospatial Day in an appropriate manner, including through educational and public awareness activities, conferences, seminars, exhibitions, and the promotion of good and responsible practices in geospatial information management and application;
3. Encourages Member States to integrate geospatial information into their national development strategies and statistical systems, and to invest in strengthening their national geospatial information management capabilities; and
4. Requests the Secretary-General to bring the present resolution to the attention of all Member States, the United Nations system and relevant organizations.