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Opening remarks
Eighth Session of the United Nations Committee of Experts
on Global Geospatial Information Management

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Dear Co-Chairs,
Members of the Bureau,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates and Observers,

We warmly welcome you to this eighth session of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM). You represent about 400 experts from all corners of the world, and you have travelled here to share your expertise in the spirit of global cooperation. Your presence is a testament to the vibrant professional community that you have created over the past seven years. I commend you all for your continued interest, energy and contribution to this essential and broad-ranging topic.

For me personally, UN-GGIM is special, as you offered me the first opportunity to appear and address an intergovernmental body of experts when I started my function as the USG for the Department of Economic and Social Affairs exactly a year ago. Over the past year, I have gotten to know you better and have been witnessing the progress you are making.

Distinguished Delegates and Observers,

At the recent High-Level Political Forum on sustainable development, which reviews progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, I presented the annual report of the Secretary-General on SDG progress. This report is underpinned by statistical and geospatial data – Maps – that show us what is happening, where we are making progress. During the discussions at the HLPF, there was broad consensus that we need reliable, timely, open and disaggregated data to inform all our actions. However, there is also a concern that progress in strengthening national data and information systems, including geospatial data, has been slow.

Therefore, I am very pleased to note that your work, towards strengthening national geospatial data and information systems, will see the adoption of a major strategic tool this week.

The ‘Integrated Geospatial Information Framework’, developed in collaboration with the World Bank, provides all countries, but especially developing countries, with a guide to develop, integrate and strengthen geospatial information management. Its aim is to ensure a sustainable flow of high-quality, timely, authoritative and accessible data in support of the implementation of the SDGs.

Importantly, the Framework will enable countries to close key gaps in access and use of data, as well as gaps in development assistance. I commend your achievement of this timely and critical work; and I am glad to note that this is yet another good example of strategic cooperation between the United Nations and the World Bank.

Distinguished Delegates and Observers,

I am pleased to see from your agenda that you will address a broad range of topics highlighting the great potential of geospatial information to increase ‘data integration’ across several thematic areas, including:

- statistics;
- the marine environment;
- land management;
- disaster management;
- geodetic positioning;
- fundamental data themes;
- legal and policy frameworks;
- institutional arrangement;
- standards; and of course,
- the SDGs.

One concrete example of the recognition of your work was the adoption of a resolution for the ‘Strategic Framework on Geospatial Information and Services for Disasters’ by ECOSOC at its 2018 annual session, just a few days ago. This Framework provides a guide for Member States to ensure the availability and accessibility of quality geospatial information and services across all phases of disaster risk reduction and management.

Dear colleagues,

A vibrant professional community such as yours is maintained and strengthened through constant cooperation and exchanges. I am, therefore, pleased to invite you to participate in the United Nations World Geospatial Information Congress, to be convened in Deqing, China, in November this year.

The Congress is being organized by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs with the support of the Government of China. The World Congress will be the first event of its kind and will be a truly global event bringing together stakeholders at the highest level to ensure that geospatial information has its widest and fullest utility in service of social, economic and environmental development. We will hear more details about the Congress in our deliberations today, and I am very much looking forward to seeing you all again in Deqing in November.

Distinguished Delegates and Observers,

As you may know, the Secretary-General has made it a top priority to ensure the United Nations work together more coherently and efficiently. As head of DESA, it is my job to ensure the Department does its utmost to support Member States in their efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda. In the DESA reform I implemented earlier this year, the themes of alignment of programmes to the SDGs, streamlining, integration and focus on capacity, have been central. For example, in the UN Statistics Division, where your GGIM Secretariat is housed, we have integrated Environmental and Geospatial Information Systems and have created a new Capacity and Data Innovation Branch. I can assure you of my Department's continued full support of your important programme.

In closing, I thank the co-Chairs of your Committee, all the Chair persons and leaders of the regional committees, subcommittee, expert groups, working groups, the authors of technical reports and the Rapporteur. I commend your strong sense of global cooperation.

I wish you a productive session. And I look forward to your deliberations and outcomes, and in making real progress on critical geospatial and development issues. Thank you.
