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Development of a statement of shared guiding principles for geospatial information management

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Note by the Secretariat

Summary

The present paper contains the report and finalized statement of shared guiding principles for geospatial information management prepared by the Working Group on the Development of a Statement of Shared Guiding Principles for consideration by the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management.

At its fourth session, held in New York from 6 to 8 August 2014, the Committee of Experts adopted decision 4/107, in which it welcomed the report of the Working Group and endorsed its terms of reference and programme of activities. The Committee of Experts noted the strong consensus on the guiding principles among its members and encouraged Member States to continue to consider the recommended principles and to provide comments for the refinement and endorsement of the principles by the Committee. Furthermore, the Committee of Experts requested that the Working Group provide a final statement of shared guiding principles for endorsement at its next session. The report describes the consultative process and the deliberations undertaken with Member States and geospatial experts since the fourth session to refine and revise the guiding principles. The final statement of shared guiding principles is contained in the report for endorsement by the Committee of Experts.

* E/C.20/2015/1.

I. Introduction

1. The need to have overarching principles or codes of conduct to clarify the distinctive social obligations inherent in the professional practices of the geospatial information management community, and to enhance the trust placed by the public on geospatial information, was initiated at the global level during the First High Level Forum on Global Geospatial Information Management in Seoul, Republic of Korea, in October 2011. A statement of ethics was further discussed at the International Symposium on Spatially Enabled Government and Society in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in February 2012 and at the United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) Hangzhou Forum in China in May 2012. Additionally, the need for a statement of ethics was raised as a substantive geospatial issue through the Committee of Experts on UN-GGIM working group on the inventory of issues (E/C.20/2012/5/Add.1).

2. These discussions were formalised in August 2012 at the second session of the Committee of Experts when the proposal to develop a statement of ethics and supporting code of conduct for the global geospatial information community (E/C.20/2012/6) was considered. The importance of the topic was reaffirmed during the nineteenth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Pacific, held in October 2012 in Bangkok. Here a resolution was adopted that requested the Committee of Experts to promulgate a statement of ethical principles for the geospatial information community (E/CONF.102/8).

3. Further at its third session, held in July 2013, the Committee of Experts considered the report “Developing a shared statement of principles on the management of geospatial information” (E/C.20/2013/11/Add.1). The report tendered further research on the subject inclusive of eight shared guiding principles. The Committee of Experts further invited the Secretariat to work with a small group of Member States, to prepare a preliminary proposal for a set of shared principles and to report back to the Committee.

4. At its fourth session, held in August 2014, the Committee of Experts welcomed the report of the Working Group on the Development of a Statement of Shared Principles that included the refined and revised set of shared guiding principles (E/C.20/2014/10/Add.1). The Committee of Experts expressed its appreciation to the Working Group for the excellent work they had done in preparing the statement of shared guiding principles, and endorsed the terms of reference and programme of activities of the Working Group. The Committee also agreed that a more appropriate title for the principles would be “A statement of shared guiding principles for geospatial information management.” Further, the Committee noted the strong consensus on the statement of shared guiding principles and requested the Working Group to provide the Committee with a final statement of shared guiding principles for endorsement at its fifth session.

5. The present report describes the consultation and the deliberation process undertaken with Member States and geospatial experts since the fourth session to revise the principles, and provides the finalized version of the statement of shared guiding principles. The Committee of Experts is invited to take note of the report and to endorse the statement of shared guiding principles for geospatial information management. Points for discussion and decision are provided in paragraph 14.

II. Objectives of the Statement of Shared Guiding Principles for Geospatial Information Management

6. The objective of creating shared guiding principles for geospatial information management is to provide a set of values to guide the choices and actions of geospatial organisations within Member States. Invariably, abiding to guiding principles are paramount to the successful operation and growth of the geospatial industry, the geospatial organization and the geospatial individual/professional.

7. The statement of shared guiding principles for geospatial information management is to provide good, overarching, and common global guidelines to support geospatial information organisations to efficiently and effectively innovate, govern and comply on geospatial information management practices among its stakeholders. The objective of these guiding principles is to engender a superior level of professionalism, and enrich the operations of national geospatial information organisations. While it is expected that the principles will be integrated within the organisation's operations and respected at all tiers, they are not binding or obligatory. It is expected that national geospatial information organisations will recognise the value of these principles, and will voluntarily abide and self-regulate, thus negating the need for monitoring.

III. Activities of the Working Group on the finalization of the Statement of Shared Guiding Principles

8. During the fourth session of the Committee of Experts, 12 interventions and suggestions for edits were tendered; 11 from Member States and one from a qualified observer organisation. The Working Group met at the end of the substantive session and decided on a plan of action to fulfil the directive of the Committee of Experts. The edits received during the fourth session were incorporated into the statement of shared guiding principles and recirculated in January 2015 to Member States and international geospatial information organisations for their final inputs and comments. A total of 28 comments were received; 26 from country representatives, one from an international organisation and one from a regional organisation (See Annex). There was a mix in the quality and content of the responses received; 14% of the respondents provided detailed amendments, while 50% fully endorsed the principles without amendments. Those respondents fully supporting the principles thought that they were of a high level, comprehensive and applicable nationally.

9. Based on the comments received two additional principles 'Expertise' and 'International cooperation and harmonization' were added under the subheading of Governance. A number of recommendations were made to strengthen the language for clarity and flow, for example the words "geospatial information organisations" was removed from the beginning of each principle and placed at the beginning of the principles list. The comments were consolidated, reviewed and discussed by the Working Group and the principles amended as deemed relevant. Further, the amended principles were recirculated to Member States and international organisations who had contributed to the revision, for their information, prior to this session of the Committee of Experts.

10. The Working Group also prepared a plan of action for the next steps beyond this session of the Committee of Experts. A major activity will be the promotion of the principles. It was noted that the principles needed to be kept alive and relevant. Therefore a cycle and level of review and update of the principles needs to be

discussed and considered. One option is for a full and consultative review every five years. In the interim, the Working Group would be required to identify emerging issues, evaluate the application of the principles, and then determine the need to undertake an interim review and/or amendment of the principles as required.

IV. The Statement of Shared Guiding Principles

11. The final version of the '*Statement of Shared Guiding Principles for Geospatial Information Management*' is now offered to the Committee of Experts and the global geospatial information community for endorsement. It provides a comprehensive body of fifteen principles grouped under three broad themes; innovation, governance, and compliance, with the order being of significance. The principles should be considered to be as living and as dynamic as the environment for which they seek to provide overarching guidance. Further, the principles were prepared to be in line with what is required to ensure that the preparation of accurate, assured and authoritative global geospatial information is able to address global challenges, and the sustainable development agenda.

Preamble

The United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management acknowledges:

- (a) High quality geospatial information is critical for evidence-based analysis and informed policy decision-making in support of sustainable development, economic growth, poverty eradication, peace and security, disaster risk reduction, and climate change adaptation;
- (b) The opportunity to use geospatial information to foster mutual knowledge and cooperation among the Member States and peoples of an increasingly connected world, demanding openness and transparency;
- (c) The unwavering trust of the public in the reliability of authoritative geospatial information is essential and depends on recognition of and adherence to a set of fundamental values and principles that, when applied to geospatial information management, support the professional independence and accountability of geospatial information organizations;
- (d) The need for precepts, values and beliefs that clarify the distinctive social responsibilities of geospatial information authorities, encourage and support stakeholders at all levels to make the right choices that foster public trust and inspire confidence in geospatial information, and to attract partners and investment;
- (e) In order to be effective, it is desirable that guiding principles are incorporated in the institutional frameworks that govern geospatial information organizations and understood at all political levels and by all stakeholders in national authorities.

Shared Guiding Principles

of a strong, successful and relevant geospatial information organization:

Innovation

- (a) **Geospatial advocacy:** is reinforced by steadfast advocates promoting applications of geospatial information that support sustainable development, economic growth, poverty eradication, peace and security, disaster risk reduction, and climate change adaptation.
- (b) **Collaboration and coordination:** encourage national, regional and global collaborations fundamental to the facilitation of improvements in the development, management, use and exchange of geospatial information, as well as the integration of statistical data and other information, in order to create new knowledge and supply products and services meeting user needs.
- (c) **Continuous development and recognition of work:** commit to policies and practices that ensure the continuous development, professional competence and ethical practices of geospatial information practitioners.
- (d) **Agility and adaptiveness:** address and take advantage of institutional, technological and other advancements in support of the development and delivery of products and services.
- (e) **Open data:** where feasible adopt policies that maximize access to and use of open, free and unrestrictive geospatial information for innovation, efficient and effective decision making and a spatially enabled society.

Governance

- (f) **Use of and adherence to geospatial standards:** embrace the development of, adherence to, and use of nationally and internationally recognized geospatial standards and interoperable geo-processing technologies. Utilization of standards and interoperable technologies will facilitate the effective and efficient creation, sharing, exchange and use of geospatial data, the open transfer of data among organizations, platforms and applications, and encourage innovation, reduce transaction costs, increase transparency, allow international compatibility and cooperation within the marketplace.
- (g) **Ownership and accountability:** facilitate trust amongst geospatial data creators, providers and users, create a clear understanding of geospatial data through the publication of metadata, including information on ownership and intellectual property rights, access and usage conditions and technical specifications (in particular currency, data models, quality and accuracy definitions). This will support informed and fit-for-purpose use and interpretation of geospatial data. Data creators and providers are responsible for compliance to the specifications of geospatial data sets made available for consumption and use.
- (h) **Transparency:** identify sources and the processes that are used to create and provide official geospatial data.
- (i) **Respect and confidentiality:** exhibit high levels of responsibility and consideration to stakeholders in the execution of daily operations. Particular care is to be exercised to protect the confidentiality of geospatial information that may adversely impact an individual, community and/or Member State. Personal data is to be especially respected and protected.

(j) **Standards of service:** employ geospatial information management best practices and solutions, and pursue excellence in the delivery of geospatial data and services. Appropriate access, fairness and equity are to be accorded to all stakeholders.

(k) **Institutional framework:** encourage and create inclusive and participatory legal, policy and administrative frameworks to manage data ownership, data quality, intellectual property and confidentiality issues.

(l) **Expertise:** value national expertise in geospatial information knowledge and experience in order to, where appropriate, comment on and validate the quality of geospatial datasets covering the national territory, seeking their overall consistency, in order to advise on matters of application, interpretation and use of geospatial information.

(m) **International cooperation and harmonization:** engage in bilateral and multilateral cooperation in geospatial information management to foster effective and efficient geospatial data management systems in all Member States. Harmonization of national geospatial data and services at regional and global levels is encouraged in order to meet the needs of supranational users.

Compliance

(n) **Sovereignty of Member States:** availability of accurate, assured and authoritative geospatial data, to support public policies and administrative procedures, is an essential requirement of Member States' autonomy, sovereignty and economic development. Such data should be considered and treated as a base infrastructure for each country, to be created and maintained as other base infrastructures.

(o) **Adherence to law:** observe laws, regulations and administrative practices of the Member States, within which they operate, as well as international laws and conventions, avoid conflict of interest and make stakeholders aware of those laws and conventions, which govern and are related to operations. The intellectual property of geospatial data creators and providers is to be acknowledged and protected.

V. Recommendations

12. This work item has been on the agenda of the Committee of Experts for four years and has gone through an equal number of consultations and even more revisions. Based on the number of iterations on the statement of shared guiding principles, the level and quality of feedback, and strong support received, the Working Group is of the opinion that Member States are now aware of the shared guiding principles, and agree on the clauses contained, their objectives and benefits in advancing and strengthening geospatial information management nationally, regionally and globally.

13. The Working Group therefore recommends that the Committee of Experts endorse the statement of shared guiding principles for geospatial information management. The Working Group in collaboration with the Secretariat:

- (a) Requests the Committee of Experts, to endorse the statement of shared guiding principles for geospatial information management, and to further refer them to the Economic and Social Council for their endorsement in 2016;

- (b) Will prepare and execute a communication/promotion plan that informs and educates Member States, and others within the global geospatial community, how to adopt the statement of shared guiding principles for geospatial information management and;
- (c) Prepare a plan for updating the principles as needed, depending on technological, institutional and other changes impacting the geospatial sector.

VI. Points for discussion

14. The Committee is invited to:

- (a) Take note of the work by the Working Group inclusive of this report and endorse the *Statement of Shared Guiding Principles for Geospatial Information Management*;**
- (b) Approve the approach to have the *Statement of Shared Guiding Principles for Geospatial Information Management* referred to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for endorsement, and commit to providing the support needed to table the principles at ECOSOC;**
- (c) Encourage Member States to adopt the *Statement of Shared Guiding Principles for Geospatial Information Management*; and**
- (d) Provide guidance on the planned activities of the Working Group, specifically its promotion and revision plans.**

**Annex 1: Responding Countries
 and organizations**

Countries

Australia	Iraq	Singapore
Austria	Japan	South Africa
Bahamas	Jordan	Spain
Bahrain	Macao	State of Palestine
Botswana	Mexico	Sudan
Canada	New Zealand	Sweden
Denmark	Norway	
Egypt	Oman	
Fiji	Philippines	
France	Romania	

Regional and International Organizations

International Federation of Surveyors (FIG)
Inter-America Institute of Geography and History (IPGH)
