Statement from the United States at the GEO-XII Plenary

November 12, 2015

Delivered by Suzette Kimball, Acting Director of the U.S. Geological Survey

Thank you, Mister Chair.

A core tenet of GEO is the provision of open and timely access to Earth observation data and tools to enable better decision-making. At last year's Plenary, we announced that the United States was releasing high-resolution elevation data from the Shuttle Radar Topography Mission and I am pleased to tell you that we completed the release of these datasets. Further, in partnership with the Committee on Earth Observation Satellites, we held capacity-building workshops in Africa and Mexico with more planned in other regions to accelerate global use of these data.

Marine biodiversity plays a vital role in maintaining the productivity and resiliency of ecosystems. The United States is pleased to be a part of the developing Marine Biodiversity Observation Network within GEOBON. Last year, NASA, NOAA, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, and commercial partner Shell Oil funded projects in the Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic Oceans to understand ongoing changes in ocean ecosystems. Now, joined by the Smithsonian Institution, we are exploring the potential to work with partners throughout the Western Hemisphere to develop a Pole-to-Pole Biodiversity Observation Network running from Antarctica to the Arctic.

Speaking of the Arctic, the National Science Foundation and National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency announced in September a collaborative Digital Elevation Model Initiative to support the development of high-resolution topographic maps of the Arctic. These agencies will collaborate with academia and industry to develop publicly available, high-resolution, satellite-derived maps of the entire Arctic by mid-2017. They will serve as a benchmark for measuring Arctic landscape change.

The United States also assists in international development and disaster planning. In August, NASA and the U.S. Agency for International Development, in partnership with Thailand, the Netherlands, and Sweden, launched SERVIR-Mekong, a project to strengthen regional environmental monitoring in five countries in Southeast Asia. The project provides early warning of dramatic changes in regional water, food security, weather and climate.

In October, the USGS took over the rotating chair of the International Charter 'Space and Major Disasters', succeeding the Indian Space Research Organisation. USGS will be leading the Charter, an international collaboration of 15 space agencies, for six months until mid-April 2016. It has been said, the International Charter is truly a unique gift from the Space Agencies to humanity.

But as important as disaster response is, building resilience around the world by helping communities mitigate the inevitable disasters they will face is a top priority. For instance, the issue of drought has relevance to all countries in Southern South America

because of the regional importance of water resources, agricultural and energy production. NOAA is actively working with the Regional Climate Center for Southern South America on developing a drought early warning information system. Participants include Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay.

On a national level, the United States is conducting its second assessment of civil Earth observation systems to inform our National Plan for Civil Earth Observations, which we expect to complete in 2017. We welcome the GEO core function to analyze and assess user needs for Earth observations and existing gaps. Coordination at international and national levels will enable GEO members to collectively understand observation needs and optimize investments in Earth observation systems.

Our many national and international Earth observation activities underscore the strong U.S. commitment to open data and international cooperation. In the coming decade, we will strive to provide the data and tools that our communities and decision makers require to address global challenges, sustainably manage our planet's resources, and enhance societal resiliency to climate change. The work that we do at the national level and with our GEO partners will also contribute to advancing the 2030 Global Goals for Sustainable Development. The United States is convinced that we can affect greater impact when we forge synergies with other programmes and organizations whose missions also aim to deliver societal benefits. In doing so, we will safeguard human lives and advance our common prosperity.