Statement from FAO GEO Principal for the GEO Ministerial Summit
5 November 2010, Beijing, China

By the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We welcome this opportunity to speak on behalf of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. We wish to thank the Government of the People's Republic of China for hosting the Group on Earth Observations' Ministerial Summit in Beijing.

One billion people, one out of every six, are food insecure. And our natural resources are already under great stress. But we must also produce 70% more food by 2050 to meet demands from a growing population. In addition, climate change is threatening production systems worldwide requiring considerable adaptation measures. Further, agriculture and forestry are expected to cut back on greenhouse gas emissions.

Altogether, this is a very very difficult equation to solve. But we have no option but to meet the food security objective, and at the same time avoid dangerous climate change. These are two key goals of our time.

Earth Observation technology and data are important tools in meeting these goals. FAO is committed to help building a Global Earth Observation System of Systems which will also support development efforts in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors.

FAO contributes to several tasks in the GEO workplan, across five of the nine Societal Benefit Areas: Agriculture, Biodiversity, Climate, Ecosystems and Water, and contributes to the cross-cutting work areas of Architecture, Data Management, Disasters and User Engagement. FAO is also committed to continue to co-lead on the GEO Portal, ensuring access to key information.

FAO also leads GEO initiatives on forests, including Forest Mapping and Change Monitoring. Last month, 117 countries attending the FAO Committee on Forestry affirmed the Global Forest Resources Assessments (FRA) process and provided guidance for the FRA 2015 report. FAO was requested to continue coordinating international efforts to efficiently use remote sensing in monitoring forests at the global level and help build capacities in countries for national level monitoring.

Coming back to the big picture goals: Achieving Food Security and Avoiding Dangerous Climate Change. We can increase the contributions of Earth Observation technology and data in meeting these goals, in fact expectations are very high that we do so. Specifically, the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors could benefit hugely from more standardized and routine use of remote sensing data – both at strategic policy levels and operational management levels.

For this reason, FAO calls for raising the ambition level in providing remote sensing data to users and stakeholders in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and natural resources management. We believe there may now be sufficient technology, sufficient data sources and sufficient financing to achieve this. Free, frequent and global remote sensing data, directly accessible in useful formats, would be a huge contribution from the Earth Observation community for the benefit of the food insecure and those threatened by climate change.

Thank you very much for your attention.