

## Pat Gallagher's Summit Opening Address

*January 17, 2014*

*Session 2 – Introduction 9h15 – 10h30*

Good morning, everyone.

It's a pleasure to join you here, and to see firsthand why the Group on Earth Observations is such a game-changer.

(slightly changed) I extend my sincere thanks to His Excellency, Minister Oberle, the Government of Geneva, and to all our Swiss hosts for your exceptional hospitality.

Early on, when GEO was beginning to take shape, the late David Broder, who is a columnist for the Washington Post, cited the GEO concept as a bright spot in a world plagued by tremendous challenges. Machines can talk to each other, he pointed out, but can people of so many different persuasions and perspectives do the same?

Congratulations to all of you! In just the first decade, the GEO community has proven exactly that. As we can see from the **Report on Progress** in our information packages -- the work on coordination of observation systems, the increased use of earth observation data, based on broad policies of open data, and used by such a wide community -- is creating a vibrant ecosystem of innovation through GEO's initial initiatives.

### **On-the-ground GEO Accomplishments**

I hope you feel great pride in the value added by GEO.

Some examples of these collaborations include:

- The Asian Water Cycle Initiative, which is harmonizing watershed data from 18 national river basins in 20 countries;
- Efforts to better understand the links between environmental change and human health;
- Efforts to better measure carbon and mercury, and to assist in forecasting the agricultural output of the world's major crops through GEO-GLAM;
- GEONETCast, through which China, Europe and the United States are supporting user priorities in 169 countries-- such as providing information

- on water in India and more reliable weather forecasts in parts of Central and South America;
- SERVIR which is strengthening the capacity of governments to integrate earth observation information into decision-making related to the climate in Central America, East Africa, and the Himalayas;
  - GEOSS in the Americas is supporting a fresh approach to forecasting water availability in a drought-stricken region of Chile, an approach that has caught the attention of others in the region; and
  - The recently launched AfriGEOSS among 22 African nations demonstrates a new vibrant and collaboration approach.

The United States, my home country, is proud to collaborate in most of these initiatives, as well as working on a new ocean acidification observing network; developed in partnership with the World Health Organization, a cholera early warning system; and leading the Global Forest Observation Initiative's capacity building through SilvaCarbon initiative.

### **Open Data: An Indispensable Asset**

Underlying the effective delivery of GEO's initiatives and its promise is a fundamental principle – and that is the principle of open, accessible and timely data.

Open government data is important for democratic governance and supports innovation, business creation and efficiency. The wonderful exhibits downstairs in our exhibit hall show the breadth of applications being developed using the range of open data products our governments are distributing.

Last May, President Obama issued an Executive Order calling for all US federal agencies to manage government information as a national resource, and to release it to the public in ways that are easy to discover, access and use, thereby leveraging this important government investment. This will add to the products, files and images already shared through GEO. My home, the U.S. Commerce Department, through our 'Open for Business Agenda,' is working to catalyze the emergence of new businesses, products and services powered by our agencies' data. Increasing access to data and data sharing, both nationally and internationally, is crucial for unleashing innovation across what is increasingly a data-driven economy,

### **Partnerships Offer a World of Opportunity**

But who is using these resources? And do they realize the huge scope of what GEO has to offer? And, more provocatively, who else *should* be using all of these resources?

We know that we have to move from making the observations available to facilitating their use. I hope you will continually widen the GEO community by leveraging current partnerships; attracting new ones -- both public and private; working with users to best hone needed tools; seeking fresh sources of support; increasing the capacity of users everywhere--all of which brings Earth observation science to where it can work for the common good.

There are technical, scientific and policy challenges yet to work through. But with our political will to succeed, I think we will succeed. This is a remarkable -- and pivotal -- time for GEO. Your community's pioneering spirit, force of conviction, and scientific and technological muscle now stretch around the world -- to regions, villages, river basins, ecosystems, laboratories, oceans, even under ground in mines. And, most importantly, to all the lives they affect.

GEO's achievements inspire us to look well beyond the current horizon. There will be breakthroughs not yet imagined. GEO will advance our understanding of the past, yield necessary insights about the present, and catalyze essential forecasts about the future.

So *yes! Absolutely yes!* Let's renew our commitment and resolve to use nearly a decade of existing investments in new and dynamic ways.

Let us join together to approve the declaration. ###