

**Draft Report**  
**61<sup>st</sup> Executive Committee Meeting**  
**Hybrid Conference, 17-18 July 2023**

*This document is submitted to the Programme Board for information.*

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Chair:

Mr Mmboneni Muofhe, South Africa

**1 SESSION 1: GENERAL BUSINESS**

**1.1 Welcome from Lead Co-Chair and Co-Chairs, Secretariat Director**

- South Africa (Lead Co-Chair), China (Co-Chair), United States (Co-Chair) and the European Commission (Co-Chairs) opened and welcomed the members to the 61<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Executive Committee, in particular the new Principal for Costa Rica as an Executive Committee member;
- Recalled the importance of the Post-2025 Strategy and the Ministerial Declaration;
- Acknowledged the progress made by GEO while concurrently noting the need for change, meaningful dialogue, improved communications and innovative thinking toward increasing the relevance, value, and impact of GEO on global environmental challenges;
- Called for the support and commitment of all members to GEO as it sets its future direction.

**1.2 Adoption of Agenda**

- Agenda (Revision 2) was adopted as distributed, with agreement to a request for more time to discuss item 2.1.

**1.3 Adoption of the Draft Report of the 60<sup>th</sup> Session and Action Items from Previous Meetings**

- The following document was approved without discussion:
  - ExCom-61.2: Draft Report of the 60<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee Meeting
- **Action 1.6:** Standard Operating Procedures (SOP):
  - GEO Secretariat highlighted the current checklist as a first step towards developing the SOP for hosting GEO Week;
  - Lead Co-Chair encouraged GEO Secretariat to have a workable SOP ready before the next Plenary, in November;

- GEO Secretariat noted that it will take some effort to develop an appropriate SOP document but assured the Executive Committee to have a revised draft with input and feedback from previous GEO Week hosts, at Cape Town.

#### **1.4 Update from the WMO Congress**

- Mr Anthony Rea briefed the Executive Committee on the outcomes of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) Congress, including:
  - Approval of the Strategic Plan and Budget for the next 4 years;
  - Election of the WMO Executive Council – the Secretary-General, the President, the Vice President, the First Vice President, the Second Vice President and the Third Vice President;
  - Highlighted key initiatives, including the Early Warnings for All (EW4All), Artificial Intelligence for EW4All, Global Greenhouse Gas Watch (GGGW), Global Cryosphere Watch (GCW), Integrated Health Services, and the approval of the Global Climate Observing System (GCOS) 2022 Implementation Plan.
- The Executive Committee thanked the WMO Representative for the update, noting the significance of the WMO Congress and elections of new officials to GEO, and welcomed the outcomes of the Congress.

#### **1.5 Secretariat Operations Report: 1 Mar 2023 through 30 June 2023**

- The GEO Secretariat presented highlights from the Secretariat Operations Report;
- The Executive Committee expressed appreciation for the extensive work by GEO Secretariat during this reporting period and visits by GEO Secretariat Director to Member countries to strengthen partnerships and collaborations;
- Executive Committee members noted the progress made on:
  - The national coordination mechanism;
  - Fostering partnerships;
  - Addressing the Executive Committee Priority areas;
  - Promoting open data, open knowledge, and data sharing principles as well as in situ data sharing;
  - The GEO Knowledge Hub; and
  - Urban resilience.

## **2 SESSION 2: GEO STRATEGY**

### **2.1 Update on GEO Post 2025**

- The Post-2025 Working Group presented the draft GEO Post-2025 Strategy;
- The Executive Committee applauded the Post-2025 Working Group for the significant work done on the strategy;

- The Executive Committee supported the Post-2025 Working Group's recommendations to address the comments made by GEO Member States, Participating Organizations, and Associates on the draft GEO Post-2025 Strategy;
- The Executive Committee recommended some definitional changes based on several comments made, particularly in the use of “triple planetary crisis”, the inclusion of “research” and “capacity development” in the description of “Earth intelligence”, framing of GEO as a partnership, clarification of the operational model, and removal of the word “sub-regional;”
- The Executive Committee highlighted that renewed and continued communication and evidence-based policy making and decision implementation should be integral to the implementation of the GEO Post-2025 Strategy;
- **Decision:** The Executive Committee accepted the recommendations of the Post-2025 Working Group to address the comments raised in the June 2023 consultation of the draft GEO Post-2025 Strategy by GEO Member States, Participating Organizations and Associates;
- **Action 2.1a:** The Executive Committee requested the Post-2025 Working Group to produce a final draft of the GEO Post-2025 Strategy in the light of the comments made at its 61<sup>st</sup> meeting and to submit the final draft to the Executive Committee for written endorsement with the report of the 61<sup>st</sup> meeting;
- **Action 2.1b:** Pending the written endorsement, the Executive Committee requested GEO Secretariat to copy-edit, finalise the design, and produce infographics under the guidance of the Post-2025 Working Group. **Due date: 2 August 2023**

## 2.2 Ministerial Declaration

- The Ministerial Working Group presented a summary of the Ministerial Declaration highlighting the tone, structure and future aspirations;
- The Executive Committee expressed appreciation for the presentation;
- The Executive Committee noted that timely submission of the declaration to Ministers is necessary in order to secure Minister-level attendance;
- The Executive Committee requested some editorial adjustments in the document, for example using “Earth intelligence” rather than “environmental intelligence,” and careful consideration of the use of the term “endorse;”
- The Executive Committee encouraged a focus on Multilateral Environmental Agreements and major international events such as the respective climate and biodiversity Conferences of the Parties (COPs) and initiatives such as EW4All;
- The Executive Committee discussed adding biodiversity as a fifth engagement priority for GEO;
- The Executive Committee noted that more “gems” or hooks are needed to make the declaration attractive to Ministers;
- **Action 2.2:** The Ministerial Working Group will prepare a second draft to be used with GEO Principals, based on consultation feedback and the Executive Committee feedback.

### 2.3 Joint Report from the Budget Working Group & GEO Secretariat

- The Budget Working Group Co-Chair and GEO Secretariat presented an analysis on the financial situation of the Secretariat Trust Fund, along with its implications;
- Two high-level 2024 budget options, namely Option 1 – “Budget to planned expenditures” and Option 2 – “Budget to expected contributions” and their implications for GEO were presented;
- The Budget Working Group:
  - unenthusiastically recommended: Option 2 – Budget to expected contributions, to the Executive Committee;
  - called on the Executive Committee to provide the Secretariat with guidance on the development of the 2024 Secretariat Trust Fund Budget.
- The Executive Committee thanked the Budget Working Group for a detailed analysis of the financial situation, noted the decline in the number of contributing Members (14 in 2023) despite the increase in total members, and the serious threat of low contribution levels to GEO’s long-term relevance;
- The Executive Committee noted the need for finding solutions that will bring in money in the short term, and not just in the long term.

### 2.4 GEO Secretariat Budget discussion – short - and long-term considerations

- Lead Co-Chair called on Members to strive beyond Option 2 and pursue innovative solutions to mobilize funding;
- The Executive Committee called for the completion of Action 6o.4 (Due Diligence Framework) as soon as possible and proposed a number of actions and ideas, including:
  - A financial gap analysis, identifying the difference between what the current contribution levels can support and what is needed to support the implementation of the Post-2025 Strategy and objectives;
  - Providing a “menu” of options for contributing countries to fund in addition to core operations;
  - Clarifying the mechanism for providing earmarked contributions for instance for travel, and capacity development activities;
  - A potential, “matching fund” within Regional caucuses to encourage non-contributors to begin contributing.
- The Executive Committee highlighted the need to identify GEO’s unique value to attract funding including by:
  - Amplifying the role of GEO in science-policy interface and supporting reporting under Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEA);
  - Reflecting GEO’s value in its Work Programme, structure, and operations;
  - Communicating GEO’s value to the public at large.
- **Action 2.4:** the Executive Committee requested the Budget Working Group to reconvene to present immediate and near-term options on budget/funding,

including developing a budget that shows activity-oriented funding needs and a transparency/traceability methodology for donors who wish to contribute towards specific efforts.

### **3 SESSION 3: GEO WORK PROGRAMME**

#### **3.1 Report of the 26<sup>th</sup> Programme Board**

- The Programme Board Co-Chair reported progress from the 26<sup>th</sup> Programme Board meeting, noting the successful organization of the GEO Symposium 2023, Open Data and Open Knowledge Workshop (ODOK), and GEO Work Programme Coordination Workshops for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resource Mobilization Toolkit;
- The Programme Board made important decisions on the Post-2025 incubator process, approved the criteria for the GEO 2023 Awards and endorsed the continuation of the GEO Working Groups;
- The Executive Committee thanked the Programme Board for the presentation and expressed appreciation for the contributions of outgoing Co-Chair, Andiswa Mlisa.

#### **3.2 Update on Global Ecosystems Atlas and Request for Seed Funding**

- The GEO Secretariat presented an updated document on the Global Ecosystems Atlas that included the vision, work streams, timeline and budget for the initial design phase and sought financial and in-kind support from Executive Committee members;
- The Executive Committee requested and received clarification from the GEO Secretariat on the role of existing relevant GEO activities, planned user engagement, and prospective operating modes involving co-financing for the Atlas development;
- The Executive Committee was appreciative of GEO Secretariat's coordination efforts and called for a fair and transparent management framework of the Atlas;
- The European Commission suggested a funding opportunity under the European Horizon call related to the European-China cooperation framework on biodiversity;
- Senegal highlighted the importance of conveying the Atlas use-cases for countries during GEO Week.

#### **3.3 GIDTT – next steps**

- The GEO Secretariat presented the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the GEO Infrastructure Development Task Team (GIDTT);
- The Executive Committee thanked the GEO Secretariat for the presentation and the revised ToR;
- The Executive Committee encouraged the inclusion of big data organizations (data providers) in the GIDTT to share their expertise;
- Decision: The Executive Committee approved the GIDTT updated ToR;

- The following document was approved:
  - ExCom-61.12: GIDTT Updated Terms of Reference.

### 3.4 Ministerial Summit and GEO Week

- The GEO Secretariat and South Africa presented an update on the preparation for upcoming GEO Week and Ministerial 2023, including the details of the draft agenda for the Plenary and an overview of the Ministerial Summit:
  - Noting the structure of the Summit is framed around the Post-2025 Strategy;
  - Noting the addition of a new component to Ministerial Summit which is the youth panel and declaration to amplify youth voices on Earth observations;
  - Noting that there are EDI guidelines provided to session hosts.
- The Executive Committee was informed that the end of registration for GEO Week is a month in advance, in line with the requirements of the South Africa Security Agency;
- The Executive Committee expressed gratitude for the progress made in the preparation for the GEO Week and Ministerial Summit and committed to supporting activities and providing experts for GEO Week;
- The Executive Committee called for a deadline for Ministerial speaker nominations for the Summit Agenda;
- The Executive Committee advised against funding Ministers' travel to GEO Week/Ministerial Summit due to associated high costs and logistics;
- The Executive Committee agreed that the Secretariat can extend an invitation to Associates to actively participate in the Plenary.

### 3.5 Future GEO Weeks

- The GEO Secretariat presented both timing and branding challenges around current GEO Week planning;
- The GEO Secretariat proposed renaming and shifting GEO Week to Earth Day (April 22) as soon as 2025, skipping the autumn GEO Week in 2024, thus providing adequate time to plan the 2025 event to deliver the Post-2025 Implementation Plan;
- The European Commission informed the Executive Committee it is exploring options to host GEO Week 2025 in Brussels for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of GEO;
- **Decision:** The Executive Committee welcomed and approved the proposal to rebrand GEO Week and to move GEO Week from November to April, cautioning that the Easter holiday season usually falls in April.
- The following document was approved:
  - ExCom-61.14(Rev1): GEO Weeks 2024-2025.

#### 4 SESSION 4: OTHER BUSINESS

##### 4.1 Follow up: GEO Week Standard Operating Procedures

- **Action 4.1a:** The GEO Secretariat will send out a request to previous GEO week hosts for feedback to help develop SOP;
- **Action 4.1b:** The GEO Secretariat will develop an early draft SOP in time for GEO Week.

##### 4.2 Review of Requests to join GEO as Participating Organizations and Review of Applications for Associate status

- **Decision:** The Executive Committee approved the proposed applications;
- The following documents were approved:
  - ExCom-61.16: Review of Applications for Participating Organization status;
  - ExCom-61.17: Review of Applications for Associate status.

##### 4.3 Any Other Business

##### 4.4 Review of Action Items

- The GEO Secretariat presented outcomes and actions from the meeting.

##### 4.5 Closing Remarks

- The Lead Co-Chair and Co-Chairs provided closing remarks.

## **Draft Report**

### **61<sup>st</sup> Executive Committee Meeting**

### **Hybrid Conference, 17 & 18 July 2023**

#### **FULL REPORT**

#### **1 SESSION 1: GENERAL BUSINESS**

##### **1.1 Welcome from Lead Co-Chair and Co-Chairs, Secretariat Director**

Mr Mmboneni Muofhe (South Africa), Meeting Chair and 2023 GEO Lead Co-Chair, welcomed members to the 61<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Executive Committee and opened the meeting. Mr Muofhe highlighted the significant progress made in preparation for the Ministerial Summit and encouraged active participation during the meeting. He stressed the importance of continuous improvement and finding suitable solutions to effectively address emerging challenges. Mr Muofhe emphasized the importance of addressing budgetary concerns and shaping the GEO's future through innovative thinking and the introduction of new ideas.

Mr LIU Zhichun (China) thanked the Lead Co-Chair and the GEO Secretariat staff for their efforts in organizing the 61<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Executive Committee. Mr Liu highlighted recent developments in GEO's progress, particularly mentioning the strategic discussions that took place during the visit of the GEO Secretariat Director to China. Mr Liu commended the Secretariat for organizing successful events like the GEO symposium and Open Data Open Knowledge (ODOK) workshop, which garnered substantial recognition and engagement from the GEO community. Additionally, Mr Liu acknowledged China's valuable contributions to disaster risk reduction, wherein valuable data and analysis reports were provided for international disaster responses.

Ms Joanna Drake (European Commission) emphasized the critical importance of Earth observations in shaping environmental policies and actions, particularly in the context of climate change. Ms Drake acknowledged GEO's potential significant contributions to ambitious objectives, such as climate neutrality, pollution reduction, and biodiversity conservation goals, which have been embraced within the European Union's Green Deal. The European Commissions investment in GEO through funding, data sharing, and research infrastructure was highlighted. Ms Drake advocated for the future of GEO, emphasizing the need to evolve through building on previous successes and also through more and improved communication particularly on the impact and value of GEO's achievements. The upcoming Ministerial Summit and Declaration hold particular importance in paving the way for GEO's evolution beyond 2025 and contributing to global climate change efforts. Ms Drake called for a sense of collective responsibility in shaping GEO's successful future and making a global difference in climate adaptation.

Mr Stephen Volz (United States) welcomed Ms Marilyn Calvo, the new principal from Costa Rica. Mr Volz emphasized the committee's duty to engage in meaningful dialogues



concerning GEO's future, building upon its achievements and undergoing essential transformations to ensure lasting impact and sustainability. He highlighted the significance of mutual support and collaborative efforts in charting the best path forward for the organization.

Ms Yana Gevorgyan (GEO Secretariat Director) warmly welcomed the attendees.

**Outcomes:**

- South Africa (Lead Chair), China (Co-Chair), United States (Co-Chair) and the European Commission (Co-Chairs) opened and welcomed the members to the 61st meeting of the Executive Committee, in particular the new Principal for Costa Rica as an Executive Committee member;
- Recalled the importance of the Post-2025 Strategy and the Ministerial Declaration;
- Acknowledged the progress made by GEO while concurrently noting the need for change, meaningful dialogue, improved communications and innovative thinking toward increasing the relevance, value, and impact of GEO on global environmental challenges;
- Called for the support and commitment of all members to GEO as it sets its future direction.

**1.2 Adoption of Agenda**

The Lead Co-Chair asked if there were any comments or interventions to adjust the agenda. France made a proposal to allocate additional time for the presentation and discussion of agenda item 2.1: “Update on GEO Post 2025”. The European Commission endorsed France proposal.

**Outcomes:**

- Agenda (Revision 2) was adopted as distributed, with agreement to the request for more time to discuss item 2.1.

**1.3 Adoption of the Draft Report of the 60<sup>th</sup> Session and Action Items from Previous Meetings**

The Lead Co-Chair asked about Action 1.6, which involves creating an initial “Standard Operating Procedures” (SOP) document for countries hosting GEO Week.

Ms Yana Gevorgyan (GEO Secretariat Director) explained that the Secretariat initiated the development of the SOP for GEO Week by utilizing the existing checklist as a starting point. Input and feedback from experienced members will be sought to finalize the SOP after the current Ministerial Summit.

The Lead Co-Chair emphasized the value of having a practical document that outlines hosting expectations, acknowledging that it may not be perfect. Mr Muofhe highlighted the importance of addressing this issue during the upcoming Cape Town meeting to proactively avoid potential challenges for future event hosts.

**Outcomes:**

- The following document was approved without discussion:

- ExCom-61.2: Draft Report of the 60<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee Meeting
- **Action 1.6** – Standard Operating Procedures (SOP):
  - The GEO Secretariat highlighted the current checklist as a first step towards developing the SOP for hosting GEO Week.
  - Lead Co-Chair encouraged GEO Secretariat to have a workable SOP ready before the next Plenary in November.
  - The GEO Secretariat noted that it will take some effort to develop an appropriate SOP document but assured the Executive Committee to have a revised draft with input and feedback from members at Cape Town.

#### 1.4 Update from the WMO Congress

Mr Anthony Rea (Director, Infrastructure Department, World Meteorological Organization) presented an overview of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) Congress. Mr Rea outlined the key outcomes, such as the agreement on the strategic plan and budget for the next four years and provided insights into specific initiatives such as the Early Warnings for All (EW<sub>4</sub>All) Initiative, hydrological assembly, and the use of artificial intelligence. Additionally, Mr Rea touched on the approval of documents related to observing systems, Global Greenhouse Gas Watch (GGGW), cryosphere integration, and services like integrated health and drought services. Mr Rea discussed the election results for the positions of Secretary General, President, Vice Presidents, and Executive Council members.

The Executive Committee thanked Mr Rea for sharing the recent progress and updates from the WMO Congress. China emphasized the importance of establishing a robust collaboration with the WMO's existing infrastructure opportunities. Furthermore, China expressed the intention to enhance collaboration with both the WMO and World Climate Research Programme (WCRP) as outlined in GEO's Post-2025 Strategy. China stressed the importance of integrating ground observations, simulation prediction, and modelling capabilities to enable informed decision-making.

#### Outcomes:

- Mr Anthony Rea briefed the Executive Committee on the outcomes of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) Congress, including:
  - Approval of the Strategic Plan and Budget for the next 4 years;
  - Election of the WMO Executive Council - the Secretary-General, the President, the Vice President, the First Vice President, the Second Vice President and the Third Vice President;
  - Highlighted key initiatives, including the Early Warning for All (EW<sub>4</sub>All), Artificial Intelligence for EW<sub>4</sub>All, Global Greenhouse Gas Watch (GGGW, Global Cryosphere Watch (GCW), Integrated Health Services, and the approval of the Global Climate Observing System (GCOS) 2022 Implementation Plan.

- The Executive Committee thanked the WMO Representative for the update, noting the significance of the WMO Congress and elections of new officials to GEO, and welcomed the outcomes of the Congress.

### **1.5 Secretariat Operations Report: 1 Mar 2023 through 30 June 2023**

Ms Yana Gevorgyan (GEO Secretariat, Director), Ms Madeeha Bajwa (GEO Secretariat, Chief Work Programme Coordinator), and Ms Nicoleta Panta (GEO Secretariat Chief of Communications and Partnerships) presented a comprehensive summary of the Secretariat's Operations Report. The GEO Secretariat Director highlighted significant achievements, including the successful convening meeting for the Global Ecosystems Atlas and the collaborative development of the Global Heat Resilience Service with WMO. The Secretariat participated in key stakeholder engagement events, such as the National Adaptation Plan Expo, and actively supported consultations and outreach for the Post-2025 Strategy, Ministerial Declaration, and GEO Week 2023 and Ministerial Summit. In addition, the Secretariat played a crucial role in implementing the Early Warnings for All initiative (EW4ALL) and worked with the GEO Work Programme to begin development of the GEO Resource Mobilization Toolkit. The Secretariat provided valuable support to the GEO-LDN (GEO Land Degradation Neutrality) initiative. Ms Gevorgyan emphasized the importance of stakeholder engagement through increased bilateral missions and webinars, highlighting key fostered partnerships with countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and active engagement with small island states.

Ms Madeeha Bajwa (GEO Secretariat Chief Work Programme Coordinator) provided an overview of the Open Data and Open Knowledge (ODOK) Workshop, the GEO Symposium, and the Programme Board meeting held in June 2023, with active participation from the GEO community. These events served as crucial milestones leading up to GEO Week and the Ministerial Summit, allowing for strategic discussions on the Post-2025 strategy and GEO infrastructure. Additional updates on the Work Programme highlighted the partnership between GEO-LDN and the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD) for data utilization in African countries, collaborations between GEOGloWS and the World Health Organization (WHO) for cholera forecasting in Malawi, and GEO Work Programme coordination workshops for co-developing activities and toolkits. The Secretariat's focus on communicating the impact stories of the GEO Work Programme activities was emphasized, which will be showcased in the upcoming Highlights Report and the new website. Additionally, the introduction of new categories for the 2023 GEO Awards (Emerging Leaders and Team Impact) aimed to recognize impactful collaborations. GEO's participation in the NAP Expo and collaboration with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Technology Executive Committee for EW4All-related initiatives were discussed. Least Developed Countries showed interest in integrating innovative Earth observations into their proposals for the Green Climate Fund, with detailed achievements to be available in the report and on the website.

Ms Nicoleta Panta (GEO Secretariat Chief of Communications and Partnerships) provided an update on the team's recent activities. She mentioned the successful solicitation for GEO Week 2023 side-events and exhibits, for which a significant number of applications (141 side events and 29 exhibits) were received. The Secretariat was also successful in

working with applicants to achieve a high acceptance rate. The Secretariat also played a considerable role in developing the Ministerial Declaration, GEO Week and Ministerial Summit agenda. The Secretariat worked on creating GEO's value proposition for different target audiences and designed a user-friendly pitch deck for communication. Additionally, the team actively participated in designing and editing materials, including the Global Ecosystems Atlas, Global Heat Resilience Service visual identity, and the Post-2025 Strategy. The Secretariat also highlighted progress in building the new GEO external website; several key technical aspects had been completed, with content development to follow.

South Africa expressed their gratitude for the progress made by the Secretariat, particularly in the extensive work on national coordination mechanisms and various training projects on LDN in Africa. South Africa assisted with increasing in situ data access, mentioning the South African Environmental Observation Network (SAEON) as a potential collaborator. Additionally, South Africa supported the Secretariat's outreach efforts for the Ministerial Summit and offered to engage further in those areas.

Japan thanked the Secretariat for the informative presentation and conveyed appreciation for the GEO Secretariat Director's visit to Japan, along with the bilateral meetings with member organizations. The Ministry has taken proactive steps in response to the discussions held during the visit, particularly focusing on the search for additional in situ data providers, which is a crucial requirement for the successful implementation of the GEO Work Programme.

Nigeria conveyed gratitude for the inclusion of the climate and land, or urban resilience, nexus in GEO's initiatives. They highlighted Nigeria's proficiency in this field, citing ongoing collaborations with the UN-Habitat to aid internally displaced persons affected by floods and the establishment of a land information system to empower a marginalized community near Nigeria's federal capital city. Nigeria expressed eagerness to engage with GEO, offering their country's expertise and cooperation in these projects.

China expressed gratitude to the GEO Secretariat Director for her effective leadership and dedication in overseeing the staff and advancing the work plan. China also praised the Secretariat for successfully implementing key tasks assigned by the Executive Committee.

#### **Outcomes:**

- The GEO Secretariat presented highlights from the Secretariat Operations Report;
- The Executive Committee expressed appreciation for the extensive work by GEO Secretariat during this reporting period and visits by GEO Secretariat Director to Member countries to strengthen partnerships and collaborations;
- Executive Committee members noted the progress made on:
  - the national coordination mechanism;
  - fostering partnerships;
  - addressing the Executive Committee Priority areas;
  - promoting open data, open knowledge, and data sharing principles as well as in situ data sharing;
  - the GEO Knowledge Hub; and
  - urban resilience.

## 2 SESSION 2: GEO STRATEGY

### 2.1 Update on GEO Post 2025

Mr Osamu Ochiai (Post-2025 Working Group) provided an update on the progress of the Post-2025 draft strategy document. The Working Group held a total of twelve meetings, three of which were conducted in person, leading to the development of four distinct versions of the strategy. The Working Group conducted outreach activities and two consultations: one in April with the GEO community at large and one in June with GEO Member States, Participating Organizations and Associates. Presenting the results from the June consultation, Mr Ochiai outlined six key areas covered in the strategy that attracted the most comments, namely: 1) the triple planetary crisis, 2) Earth intelligence, 3) vision, mission, GEO's offer, 4) partnerships, 5) Regional Growth and 6) the operating model. During the consultation phase, the Working Group received valuable input and presented their proposed revisions to the document in response to the input. These revisions include incorporating a graphical representation of the triple planetary crisis and referencing the UNDP 2022 report, providing a comprehensive definition of Earth intelligence, revising the mission statement, and simplifying the statement outlining what GEO offers. The Post-2025 Working Group acknowledged that they received many comments to consider during the development of the implementation plan, which should be initiated after the Ministerial Summit.

Japan expressed gratitude to the Post-2025 Working Group for their remarkable efforts in creating the GEO Post-2025 strategy draft document within a challenging timeframe. Japan voiced support for the concept of “Earth intelligence” as part of an innovative renewed GEO mandate, recognizing the increasing expectations for GEO and its mission to improve the Earth observation value chain and foster collaboration with diverse stakeholders. While Japan endorsed the draft, they raised the question whether the strategy should cover a specific time frame. Japan emphasized the importance of further discussing this matter during the upcoming strategy deliberations.

France thanked the Secretariat and the Working Group for their efforts in developing the document and expressed a preference for definitive endorsement once a consolidated version is made available through a written procedure. France appreciated the consideration given to the role of users and knowledge, particularly as a Ministry of Research. France recommended including science/research and capacity building to the current description of “Earth intelligence.” Additionally, France suggested including a clearer definition of partnership and proposed the development of an ethical charter to promote shared values among public and private partners. France also advocated for specific and measurable objectives in the strategy and noted the importance for member states to take decisions concerning digital sovereignty.

The European Commission appreciated the progress made in the Post-2025 strategy by the Working Group, considering it a strong foundation for GEO's future. The European Commission emphasized the importance of GEO's intergovernmental character that promotes the formation of partnerships and suggested rephrasing the text to highlight this aspect more effectively. The European Commission shared that some EU Member States raised concerns about the term “Earth intelligence” and requested further examination

and clarification to determine its appropriateness and avoid potential negative associations. The European Commission called for improved clarity regarding GEO's objective to provide open knowledge and tools in support of equity, stressing that achieving this goal requires collaboration beyond GEO. Lastly, the European Commission recommended providing a more detailed elaboration on the operating model outlined in the strategy.

Senegal conveyed their appreciation to the Post-2025 Working Group members for their exceptional efforts and acknowledged the productive discussions, particularly regarding the concept of “Earth intelligence,” which Senegal endorsed.

South Africa welcomed GEO's new long-term strategy and considered it a strong framework to expand global data, information, and services offerings. South Africa also supported the need for clear wording regarding maintaining GEO as an intergovernmental organization. While recognizing the focus on the planetary crisis, South Africa suggested exploring the inclusion of additional wording to address specific African challenges like food security and energy crisis within GEO's future initiatives. South Africa was satisfied with the revised definition of “Earth intelligence” and emphasized the importance of balance in involving both developed and developing countries, promoting inclusion and equity throughout the strategy. Lastly, South Africa proposed incorporating exploring quantitative methods to assess the economic benefits and savings resulting from Earth observation tools and services, which they believe would attract investments and provide a valuable metric for guiding the strategy's implementation.

China expressed sincere appreciation for the diligent efforts of the Post-2025 Working Group. China suggested using the term “integrated priority demonstration area” (IPAs) instead of “sub-regional” to avoid potential management complexities. China emphasized that GEO's primary goal should be to encourage stakeholders to address global engagement priorities at the local level, fostering collaboration and impactful outcomes. Regarding “Earth intelligence”, China acknowledged that its inclusion in the strategy may not be entirely suitable, however, and appreciated South Africa's proposed description of “Earth intelligence” modification to prevent misunderstandings.

The United States applauded the Working Group for their exceptional efforts in defining the future vision for GEO. The United States agreed with China on the suitability of the term “Earth intelligence”. The United States emphasized the importance of equity and representation of all stakeholders as essential objectives for GEO, highlighting the need to tailor Earth intelligence to recipients for effective utilization. The United States suggested focusing on definitional changes rather than adding significant additional content to the document and emphasized the importance of developing an implementation plan. The United States also stressed the significance of resource allocation and ministerial support to make the vision executable. The United States underscored that addressing objectives and ensuring the organization's capacity to achieve them are crucial for the future success of GEO.

Representatives of the Post-2025 Working Group thanked the Executive Committee and acknowledged the positive feedback received on the term “Earth intelligence”, recognizing the need for further refinement of the term to address feedback from some members. The Working Group sought guidance on the decision-making process regarding the

document's timeframe, pondering whether it should be managed internally within the group or through discussions with the Executive Committee. Concerning thematic priorities, the Working Group clarified that while the triple planetary crisis provides the context for the strategy, it should not be considered the mechanism for identifying priorities.

The Lead Co-Chair stressed the central and crucial role of communication in advocating for GEO, particularly in engaging policymakers, users, and stakeholders. He strongly emphasized the need to prioritize continuous communication as a vital aspect throughout the implementation phase and beyond, to ensure that GEO's good work does not go unrecognized.

The United States acknowledged the importance of communication to external recognition for GEO's value and emphasized the value partnerships can provide by showcasing GEO's impact. The United States appreciated the suggestion to include research in the definition of "Earth intelligence" for continuous innovation and learning. Regarding the strategy's timeline, the United States proposed an "evergreen" approach that allows for both short-term and long-term milestones to be identified in the implementation plan.

Italy stressed the significance of effective communication to enhance GEO's impact in the policymaking process. Italy appreciated the Post-2025 strategy document and acknowledged other ongoing initiatives related to mitigating the triple planetary crisis, such as the United Nations Environment Programme's science policy interface platform. Italy raised a question about how the Post-2025 strategy intends to connect and collaborate with these initiatives to prevent duplication and ensure consistent methods for scenario analysis involving socioeconomic and policy-driven factors.

The European Commission proposed to highlight user involvement more strongly in the strategy, for example through a modification to the strategy title. Concerning the operating model, The European Commission observed that the current phrasing lacks recognition of the preservation of successful initiatives and flagships.

#### **Outcomes:**

- The Post-2025 Working Group presented the draft GEO Post-2025 Strategy;
- The Executive Committee applauded the Post-2025 Working Group for the significant work done on the strategy;
- The Executive Committee supported the Post-2025 Working Group's recommendations to address the comments on the draft GEO Post-2025 Strategy by GEO Member States, Participating Organizations and Associates;
- The Executive Committee recommended some definitional changes based on several comments made particularly in the use of "triple planetary crisis", inclusion of "research" and "capacity development" in the description of "Earth intelligence", framing of GEO as a partnership, clarification of the operational model, and removal of the word "sub-regional";
- The Executive Committee highlighted that renewed and continued communication and evidence-based policy making and decision implementation should be integral to the implementation of the GEO Post-2025 Strategy;

- Decision: The Executive Committee accepted the recommendations of the Post-2025 Working Group to address the comments raised in the June 2023 consultation of the draft GEO Post-2025 strategy by GEO Member States, Participating Organizations and Associates.
- **Action 2.1a:** The Executive Committee requested the Post-2025 Working Group to produce a final draft of the GEO Post-2025 Strategy in the light of the comments made at its 61<sup>st</sup> meeting and to submit the final draft to the Executive Committee for written endorsement with the report of the 61<sup>st</sup> meeting
- **Action 2.1b:** Pending the written endorsement, the Executive Committee requested GEO Secretariat to copy-edit, finalise the design and produce infographics under the guidance of the Post-2025 Working Group. **Due date: 2 August 2023.**

## 2.2 Ministerial Declaration

Mr Lawrence Friedl (Ministerial Working Group Co-Chair) provided an overview of the Ministerial Declaration. The main emphasis of the Working Group was to develop a concise, forward-looking, and inclusive Ministerial Declaration that effectively highlights GEO's contributions and accomplishments while addressing future challenges. The main points covered in the presentation are as follows:

- The current document version is 1.5 and is undergoing internal work by the Working Group;
- The document is structured into three sections: New World, New GEO, and New Commitments;
- The aim is to reduce the document's length to 2-3 pages from its original 4 pages;
- Feedback from 107 comments representing 7 countries and 2 associates was obtained during the consultation process;
- The next steps involve further revisions, a consultation period, and the compilation of an overall package for the Ministerial Summit.

Key Working Group topics discussed encompass inter alia, strategic priorities, the urban agenda, the triple planetary crisis, and potential reference to international frameworks, adding biodiversity as a fifth engagement priority.

Australia thanked the Ministerial Working Group for their diligent efforts. Australia raised concerns about language indicating that ministers would be endorsing the Work Programme without having an opportunity to review it beforehand and suggested that “endorse” should be replaced by “support”. Australia recommended revising the language in the document to enhance clarity and understanding. Additionally, Australia suggested a two-year review period for the Ministerial Declaration to align it with the strategy's high-level approach and to facilitate prompt implementation. Australia sought clarification on the inclusion of biodiversity in the strategy, considering its relationship to the triple planetary crisis. Lastly, Australia emphasized the significance of swift action and timely information to ensure the in-person attendance of their ministers at the GEO Week and Ministerial Summit in November.

France supported biodiversity as a priority in the strategy and requested to review the declaration once more before its final version.



China recommended adopting the term introduced in the Post-2025 strategy document to maintain consistency and avoid introducing additional new terms alongside “Environmental intelligence” and “Earth intelligence”. While acknowledging the significance of GEO-LDN as a new flagship project, China advised broadening the focus beyond specific activities to encompass a broader range of global engagement agreements and priorities within the Declaration. Furthermore, China suggested consolidating relevant content from the second part of the declaration into the third part to streamline references to the Post-2025 strategic plan, believing that a single mention of the Post-2025 strategy would be sufficient. China re-emphasized the utmost importance of enhancing user participation, bridging the data and information gap between developed and developing nations, and fostering connectivity among individual infrastructures maintained by GEO members.

The United States commended the document's emphasis on equity and inclusion, acknowledging their significance in achieving GEO's success. Regarding biodiversity, the United States agreed with Australia's observation that it is already addressed within the identification of the triple planetary crisis. The United States believes that any introduction of a fifth objective should undergo internal discussion and careful planning before presenting it at the ministerial level.

The European Commission expressed satisfaction that the document will be condensed to three pages, making it concise, impactful, and appealing to the political class. The European Commission proposed officially endorsing the Global Biodiversity Framework as a fifth engagement priority for GEO, considering its growing significance in the political agenda alongside pollution and climate issues. The European Commission appreciated improvements in the wording concerning partnerships and the characterization of GEO as an intergovernmental initiative and sought further clarification on the concept of “inclusive partnership”. The European Commission also suggested enhancing clarity in the declaration regarding operating models and financing approaches to improve understanding of their implications. While acknowledging the importance of discussing the legal status of GEO, the European Commission believed that the current declaration was not the appropriate venue for detailed discussions on this topic. Additionally, the European Commission agreed on the importance of using hooks to effectively engage ministers and the political class.

**Outcomes:**

- The Ministerial Working Group presented a summary of the Ministerial Declaration highlighting the tone, structure and future aspirations;
- The Executive Committee expressed appreciation for the presentation;
- It noted that timely submission of the declaration to Ministers is necessary in order to secure Minister-level attendance;
- It requested some editorial adjustments in the document, for example using “Earth intelligence” rather than “environmental intelligence”, and careful consideration of the use of the term “endorse”;
- It encouraged a focus on Multilateral Environmental Agreements and major international events, such as the respective climate and biodiversity Conferences of the Parties (COPs), and related initiatives, such as the EW4All;

- It discussed adding biodiversity as a fifth engagement priority for GEO;
- It noted that more “gems” or hooks are needed to make the declaration attractive to Ministers;
- **Action 2.2:** The Ministerial Working Group to prepare 2<sup>nd</sup> draft for consultation with GEO Principals, based on consultation feedback and the Executive Committee feedback.

### 2.3 Joint Report from the Budget Working Group & GEO Secretariat

#### 2.4 GEO Secretariat Budget discussion – short- and long-term considerations

Mr Lawrence Friedl (Budget Working Group) and Ms Erika Alex (GEO Secretariat Chief of Staff) jointly presented agenda items 2.3: Joint Report from the Budget Working Group & GEO Secretariat and 2.4: GEO Secretariat Budget discussion – short- and long-term considerations. Mr Friedl addressed the strategic aspects related to budgeting and presented two distinct options. The first option entailed allocating funds to meet planned expenditures, ensuring fulfillment of the requirements. The second option involved aligning the budget with anticipated contributions, and prioritizing activities based on the available resources. Regarding the current financial status, the Budget Working Group confirmed that there are sufficient funds for the year 2023. However, the Working Group expressed concerns about the future, particularly in 2024 and onwards, as projected expenses, particularly to support the Post-2025 strategy implementation plan and continue efforts initiated in 2023, surpass expected contributions. A situation that bears consequences such as reduced efforts, deferred initiatives, or abandoned intended hiring plans. Furthermore, the Budget Working Group proposed exploring ways to augment contributions and seek alternative funding sources beyond member countries.

Ms Yana Gevorgyan (GEO Secretariat Director) highlighted the crucial importance of endorsing participatory and inclusive initiatives within GEO. Over the past 18 months, cost-saving measures have allowed for financial support to be provided to experts and representatives from diverse countries, enabling their attendance at GEO meetings and events. This support has played a pivotal role in advancing co-design and co-production approaches. Ms Gevorgyan emphasized the need to sustain funding for such participatory efforts, particularly for the Indigenous Alliance and experts from developing nations, in both governance and non-governance meetings, as well as events like NAP Expo. These efforts are vital in effectively establishing GEO's presence.

The Lead Co-Chair highlighted that the budget and trust fund contributions have been longstanding matters of concern. Although there has been a slight increase in the number of contributing countries, he stressed the need for more substantial progress in this area. The Chair underscored the significance of maintaining effective communication and engagements with members to encourage contributions, while acknowledging that previous efforts have not yielded results. The Chair acknowledged the trend of adding activities and expectations of the Secretariat without additional resources and made a strong statement that communications and engagements were a core function of GEO. The Chair also advised caution against excessive reliance on non-competitive secondments that might lack the necessary expertise.

The United States emphasized the importance of incorporating strategies to secure immediate funds, in addition to exploring innovative approaches for resource generation, which might not yield quick results. The United States also brought to attention previous unsuccessful attempts to attract new contributors, highlighting the need for a combination of immediate funding to meet objectives and innovative resource mobilization methods, acknowledging the Secretariat's work in bringing innovative approaches. Furthermore, the United States stressed the critical necessity of adequately resourcing the objectives outlined in the Ministerial Declaration and underscored the significance of a well-planned approach to accomplish these goals over time. The United States noted a gradual increase in their contributions over recent years and expressed their willingness to further enhance their support in the short term.

The European Commission proposed reevaluating past strategies and exploring innovative revenue streams from new members, taking into account the current context and value proposition. Among the available options, the European Commission favored option 2, placing emphasis on prioritizing capabilities and resources while thoroughly understanding the expected impacts of each engagement. The European Commission also emphasized the need to communicate to new members the value of GEO and the need for a communication strategy in support. While the possibility of seconding staff was mentioned, the European Commission also stressed the importance of exploring other avenues. The European Commission highlighted the significance of providing guidance as the Executive Committee on future priorities and maintaining openness to change and new approaches. The European Commission also expressed their willingness to contribute and support efforts in this direction.

Australia suggested a change in the funding approach, moving away from a general funding model to targeted contributions aimed at supporting specific projects, especially those related to GEO's membership engagement within the country. This shift was viewed as a chance to showcase concrete benefits and enhance accountability for the allocated funds. Furthermore, Australia put forward the idea of providing in-kind support through secondments, even if physically relocating to GEO's European location was not feasible.

France expressed appreciation for the presentation and voiced their support for Option 2. France emphasized the need for a well-defined strategy and expressed their willingness to await feedback from other countries. Additionally, France proposed a cost-saving measure, suggesting the replacement of expensive consultants with GEO staff. France recommended reviewing this decision in early 2024, once a clearer understanding of countries' contributions has emerged.

Japan acknowledged the challenging financial situation and highlighted their contribution to the trust fund. Japan recommended GEO focus on maximizing outputs even with limited resources and explore potential opportunities to expand those resources. Japan proposed having separate discussions for the trust fund and the GEO Work Programme, with special consideration given to attracting non-governmental capital to the trust fund. Furthermore, Japan emphasized the benefits of integrating non-governmental resources into the GEO Work Programme to ease the burden on the GEO Secretariat.

China strongly believed that engaging GEO members, attracting donations, providing improved services, and securing future contributions are all interconnected aspects that

necessitate a systematic approach. China extended their support to budget plan option 2 and specifically endorsed the proposed competitive secondment process as a reasonable and practical solution. China agreed with the importance of implementing both long-term and immediate measures and advocated for a standardized and flexible personnel secondment mechanism. Moreover, China aligned with Japan's position on upholding fundamental principles related to intergovernmental organizations while seeking increased contributions from members. China emphasized the importance of addressing Action 6o.4, which involves collaborating with the WMO to establish a due diligence framework for private sector involvement in GEO activities by 2024.

Italy recognized the significance of taking into account the outcomes from both the ministerial meeting and GEO week in South Africa. As a precautionary measure for the current period, Italy suggested opting for option 2. However, Italy also proposed revisiting the issue at the beginning of 2024, considering the unfolding developments and the results of the Ministerial meeting, as part of their plan.

The United States stressed the significance of backing any Ministerial Declaration that might deviate from option 2. The United States proposed conducting a “gap analysis” to better understand the implications of supporting option 2 concerning the expected capabilities of the GEO organization.

The Lead Co-Chair emphasized that opting for “option 2” alone would not be enough to achieve GEO’s ambitious objectives as stated in the declaration and strategy. Instead, the chair suggested actively pursuing solutions that can propel them towards a more advanced option in the medium to long term.

Ms Erika Alex (GEO Secretariat Chief of Staff) provided insights into competitive secondments and clarified certain aspects of the process. Ms Alex explained that since GEO does not have legal entity status, all HR arrangements, including secondments, are managed through WMO's contract mechanisms. The Secretariat has engaged in discussions with WMO HR regarding the competitive secondments paradigm, and it was found to be complex due to the different secondment mechanisms employed by various individuals and governments, each with unique timeframes. Ms Alex also mentioned that there is currently no virtual secondment program with WMO, and the possibility of remote or virtual secondments is limited due to UN provisions, particularly concerning travel-related issues.

On the second day of the discussion, the lead Co-Chair discussed their embassy briefing Pretoria, which included information on contributors to actively engage embassies, to raise awareness about GEO, and encourage contributions. By clarifying the distinction between GEO membership and the number of contributors to the GEO trust fund, certain countries have shown a willingness to make contributions. The Co-Chair plans to continue these sessions in various locations to encourage more countries to participate, even with modest contributions, as the cumulative impact can be significant. Additionally, the Co-Chair suggested promoting collaboration with other member states to collectively work towards achieving this objective.

The United States discussed their internal initiative collaborating with the United States Agency for International Development to raise awareness about GEO's activities. This

effort led to approximately 150 to 200 participants from different countries becoming more informed about GEO's work and fostering potential connections for future collaborations in sustainable development. Furthermore, the United States suggested adopting a matching funds approach, under which GEO caucuses in various regions would take a leading role in implementing a matching approach for cash contributions to the GEO trust fund from their respective members. To illustrate this strategy, the US plans to approach the Americas caucus members and offer to match any new contributions made to the GEO trust fund on a dollar-for-dollar basis for a specific period. This approach aims to stimulate greater participation from members, foster a sense of shared ownership and commitment to the organization, and will be presented at the forthcoming AmeriGEO meeting. The United States encouraged other caucuses to consider adopting a similar strategy to promote increased engagement and contributions from their members.

The Lead co-chair mentioned an upcoming African caucus meeting scheduled for September, during which they intend to put the suggested approach into action. The Co-Chair emphasized a critical point that emerged during the discussion, which is the limited knowledge about GEO even among countries that are already members. The Lead co-chair acknowledged that explaining GEO's work generates considerable interest and highlighted the importance of raising awareness about GEO within their own countries. The Lead Co-Chair firmly believes that, as principles, they should take the initiative to act as ambassadors for GEO and engage with their respective countries to promote awareness and mobilize resources.

Italy pointed out that GEO currently faces a challenge in being well-perceived outside its own community and stressed the importance of enhancing its ability to connect geoscience activities with the policy-making process. There is a recognized weakness in this aspect, as policymakers often lack awareness of GEO's products and projects, despite extensive support for geoscience from various agencies. To address this issue, Italy suggested that GEO should concentrate on implementing a renewed comprehensive and intensive outreach and engagement campaign with policymakers at the international level. The intention of this approach is to increase GEO's impact, attract a higher number of contributions from its members, and to play a more influential role in processes that bridge science and policy for the benefit of society.

Australia enquired about GEO's ability to receive funds for targeted projects and proposed the idea of creating a menu of targeted activities that countries could contribute to. The main objective is for countries like Australia to fund specific and identified activities they consider significant, without necessarily channelling the contributions into the general trust fund.

The Lead Co-Chair acknowledged the challenge raised by Italy – connecting science with policy-makers – and emphasized the importance of strong communication and solutions-oriented communicators in successfully bridging that gap.

China highlighted the importance of both short-term and long-term strategies to mobilize resources and provide high-quality services to GEO members. China expressed support for the concept of a matching fund and encouraged thorough exploration of opportunities while considering the complexities associated with fund management. China urged member states to directly increase their contributions to the GEO trust fund as a prompt

measure to address current challenges. Additionally, China praised Australia and other members for their specific-purpose donations, which engage members by clearly justifying the purpose and expected returns. In response to resource shortages, China suggested exploring the option of secondments and implementing a suitable evaluation and implementation mechanism. China also emphasized the significance of member engagement to improve the integration of science-policy solutions and proposed adopting successful examples from organizations like the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and World Climate Research Programme (WCRP) to initiate international collaborations among GEO members.

The European Commission believed that countries will be more inclined to contribute when there is a strong narrative about the value and benefits of their investment and consistent engagement with governments. The European Commission supported the United States' idea of pledging and put forward the proposal of exploring both short-term and long-term solutions through a budget committee and ad hoc meetings. Moreover, the European Commission emphasized the need to address the policy interface matter within GEO, which includes aspects related to the organization's structure, Work Programme, and personnel skills, and strengthening a pillar that knows how to communicate the solutions that policymakers need to hear about alongside the technical, science-oriented element. The European Commission stressed the importance of enhancing GEO's reputation and profile to facilitate meaningful interactions with policymakers and ensure the successful delivery of solutions. The European Commission advocated for prioritising communicating the value GEO brings to the public and suggested creating a narrative that highlights the organization's impact on global challenges.

Senegal emphasized their active participation in diverse projects within their country, specifically mentioning GEMIS and Digital Africa, which are involved in providing services and products. Senegal recognized that their efforts have indirectly influenced the national GEO and government, fostering a better understanding of GEO's role and garnering greater support. Furthermore, Senegal expressed their goal of promoting cross-fertilization of activities between regional and national GEO programs to enhance support for their national GEO initiatives.

Ms Yana Gevorgyan (GEO Secretariat Director) underscored the crucial importance of investing in communications and engagement for GEO, as posited by the European Commission and other members. Ms Gevorgyan highlighted the history of GEO's focus on building data-sharing solutions, and the need to focus on building communication and engagement capacity, including with youth and civil society. She discussed the ongoing efforts to establish connections with the policy community and cited engagements with countries such as China, Japan, and the United States, where their solutions were showcased in country pavilions during conventions and meetings. Ms Gevorgyan emphasized the need for members to advocate and present GEO offerings to relevant ministries in order to gain visibility and support in major international fora to feature GEO at their country pavilions. In terms of budget considerations, Ms Gevorgyan acknowledged the necessity for short-term solutions and proposed developing a menu of products or services that could attract funding from countries. However, Ms Gevorgyan also highlighted the significance of funding core functions such as IT, finance, and

administration to ensure smooth operations. Lastly, Ms Gevorgyan appreciated the idea of pledge campaigns and suggested setting a target for fundraising potentially through friendly competition among caucus leadership. This strategy could serve as a motivating factor to encourage higher levels of participation and commitment from member states.

The United States suggested a Ministerial action directing the development of both an implementation plan and a business plan to gain a comprehensive understanding of the financial requirements necessary for achieving the organization's objectives captured in the Post-2025 strategy over the next 5 to 10 years. The United States emphasized the importance of garnering support from diverse stakeholders and seeking contributions beyond the current funding available through the Secretariat. Maintaining relevance in the field was underscored as a pressing matter, and the United States cautioned against option 2, which involves building to resources without addressing funding constraints, as it could lead to obsolescence. Furthermore, the United States pledged to increase its financial contribution and called for the identification of additional funds to facilitate the development of the implementation and business plans within the next 18 months.

Australia noted that during the Executive Committee discussions, various risks concerning finance and reputation have been brought up. Australia expressed a keen interest in developing a unified strategic risk profile for GEO to gain a better understanding of the risks involved and the measures being taken to mitigate them.

Italy suggested reviewing proposals connected to funding and the Post-2025 implementation plan after the Ministerial.

The European Commission emphasized the significance of dedicating efforts to enhancing communication, value proposition, and mission aspects within the upcoming 18 months, as this period is crucial for securing funding. Existing budgetary concerns for the following year were acknowledged. Accordingly, the European Commission suggested focusing over the next 18 months, on the communication pillar that creates a compelling value proposition and narrative to attract contributions from participating. Furthermore, the European Commission anticipated that the implementation plan and business plan will include various propositions for revenue streams as part of the overall strategy.

France recognized that their involvement in GEO is made possible through the EU's contribution. France raised Italy's proposal, which aims to enhance GEO's significance by providing monitoring tools for treaties, similar to how the WMO offers reports for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). France suggested developing a strategic plan in parallel with the business plan to reinforce inclusion and recognition of GEO's in international treaties.

The Lead Co Chair closed the session acknowledging that the general consensus to plan to option 2 while concurrently having the Budget Working Group synthesize options discussed for further consideration. Further, the Lead Co Chair recognized the consistent theme of the strengthening communications and the need to support Secretariat efforts to do so.

**Outcomes:**

- The Budget Working Group Co-Chair and GEO Secretariat presented an analysis on the financial situation of the Secretariat Trust Fund along with its;
- Two high-level 2024 budget options, namely Option 1 - Budget to planned expenditures and Option 2 - Budget to expected contributions and their implications for GEO were presented.
- The Budget Working Group:
  - unenthusiastically recommended: Option 2 - Budget to expected contributions, to the Executive Committee;
  - called on the Executive Committee to provide the Secretariat with guidance on the development of the 2024 Secretariat Trust Fund Budget
- The Executive Committee thanked the Budget Working Group for a detailed analysis of the financial situation, noted the decline in the number of contributing Members (14 in 2023) despite the increase in total members, and the serious threat of low contribution levels to GEO's long-term relevance
- The Executive Committee noted the need for finding solutions that will bring in money in the short term, and not just in the long term.
- The Lead Co-Chair called on Members to strive beyond Option 2 and pursue innovative solutions to mobilize funding.
- The Executive Committee called for the completion of Action 6o.4 (Due Diligence Framework) as soon as possible and proposed a number of actions and ideas, including:
  - A financial gap analysis, identifying the difference between what the current contribution levels can support and what is needed to support the implementation of the Post-2025 Strategy and objectives;
  - Providing a “menu” of options for contributing countries to fund in addition to core operations;
  - Clarifying the mechanism for providing earmarked contributions for instance for travel, capacity development activities;
  - A potential, “matching fund” within Regional caucuses to encourage non-contributors to begin contributing.
- The Executive Committee highlighted the need to identify GEO's unique value to attract funding including by:
  - Amplifying the role of GEO in science-policy interface and supporting reporting under Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEA);
  - Reflecting GEO's value in its Work Programme, structure, and operations;
  - Communicating GEO's value to the public at large.
- **Action 2.4:** The Executive Committee requested the Budget Working Group to reconvene to present immediate and near-term options on budget/funding, including developing a budget that shows activity-oriented funding needs and a transparency/traceability methodology for donors who wish to contribute towards specific efforts.



### 3 SESSION 3: GEO WORK PROGRAMME

#### 3.1 Report of the 26<sup>th</sup> Programme Board

Mr Evangelos Gerasopoulos (Programme Board Co-chair) presented the 26<sup>th</sup> Programme Board report, highlighting the following key updates:

- The report covered major events in June 2023, including the GEO Symposium, Open Data and Open Knowledge workshop, and Programme Board meeting. The GEO Symposium focused on “GEO for people, nature, and the planet”, with 11 sessions covering various topics such as biodiversity, climate, urban resilience, operational services, and the Post-2025 roadmap. The Open Data and Open Knowledge workshop addressed technical advances, challenges, and solutions;
- The Programme Board discussed the process for the development of the Post-2025 Work Programme, including through the experience of developing the two incubators;
- Criteria and processes for the GEO Awards 2023 were approved, introducing new categories: “Team Impact” and “Emerging Lead”;
- Working Groups will continue with increased flexibility and alignment with the Post-2025 Work Programme;
- Engagement Teams provided guidance on Resource Mobilization and Capacity Development toolkits;
- Coordination workshops were held for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resource Mobilization;
- The Foundational Tasks for 2023-2025 were reviewed, resulting in some changes to consolidate tasks and align with the Post-2025 Strategy;
- The Programme Board encouraged contributions to the Post-2025 Strategy and the GEO Week Ministerial Summit;
- Andiswa Mlisa stepped down from the Co-Chair position, and new nominations for Programme Board seats will be announced.

The Executive Committee acknowledged Ms Andiswa Mlisa's considerable contributions throughout the years and valuable input to both the Programme Board and GEO.

China congratulated the Secretariat for a successful GEO Symposium and Open Data Open Knowledge workshop, emphasizing the significance of sharing data and exchanging knowledge. To improve the award selection process, China made two suggestions:

1. Update the procedures and criteria documents for the awards to align with current GEO strategy objectives;
2. Form an awards committee, including previous winners, Executive Committee members, and relevant experts, to select award recipients. This committee would report its recommendations to the Executive Committee, ensuring a fair, unbiased, and effective award selection process.

Italy endorsed China's proposal to establish an awards committee.

Ms Yana Gevorgyan (GEO Secretariat Director) clarified that an award subgroup was originally the model through which the GEO awards were implemented; however, it had proven to be a time-consuming process. The Awards jury proposal was discussed with

members of the subgroup and endorsed to the Programme Board and successfully implemented in the 2022 GEO Awards. Ms Gevorgyan urged careful consideration before making a commitment to revert to the committee mode.

**Outcomes:**

- The Programme Board Co-Chair reported progress from the 26<sup>th</sup> Programme Board meeting, noting the successful organization of the GEO Symposium 2023, Open Data and Open Knowledge Workshop (ODOK), and GEO Work Programme Coordination Workshops for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resource Mobilization Toolkit;
- The Programme Board made important decisions on the Post-2025 incubator process, approved the criteria for the GEO 2023 Awards and endorsed the continuation of the GEO Working Groups;
- The Executive Committee thanked the Programme Board for the presentation and expressed appreciation for the contributions of the outgoing Co-Chair, Andiswa Mlisa.

**3.2 Update on Global Ecosystems Atlas and Request for Seed Funding**

Ms Madeeha Bajwa (GEO Secretariat Chief Work Programme Coordinator) provided a comprehensive update on the advancements of the Global Ecosystems Atlas initiative. The convening meeting of the Atlas was held on May 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, attracting more than 70 participants from over 40 organizations, including countries from the Pacific, Costa Rica, Maldives, South Africa, and various public and private entities. The meeting garnered extensive endorsement and support for the concept and necessity of the Atlas. During the meeting, significant discussions centered around scoping and identifying practical applications for the Atlas, with the aim of addressing the fragmentation of ecosystems products and tools. The principle of co-design and co-development was heavily emphasized, with an active involvement of countries in the process. To achieve impactful outcomes, the project has delineated five primary work streams of scientific, technological, legal, financial, and practical aspects, necessitating a seed funding budget of 740,000 Swiss francs. This budget was formulated through a collaborative effort, taking into account the input and requirements expressed by participants in the convening meeting, as well as insights drawn from similar platforms. Ms Bajwa requested financial and in-kind support from ExCom, stressing the urgency of the project, considering recent developments like the adoption of the Global Biodiversity Framework and the EU Nature Restoration Law.

The Lead Co-Chair shared his experience of attending the Global Ecosystems Atlas convening meeting. The Global Ecosystems Atlas exemplifies how Earth intelligence aligns with the Post-2025 strategy to contribute to global objectives. The Co-Chair believed that such collaborations could establish a model for successful partnerships within GEO, promoting a sense of ownership and identity to ensure the success of initiatives.

China thanked the Secretariat for the clear presentation and valued the incubator concept. China emphasized the importance of long-term support and utilizing existing results for successful global implementation. China encouraged adherence to the principles of full openness to promote broad participation and expand GEO's influence internationally.

China also suggested creating assessment indicators for fair and transparent engagement and accurately reflecting each country's contributions.

France thanked the GEO Secretariat for the concise presentation and inquired about the participation of Atlas users and the formulation of use cases. France recommended leveraging GEO's in-house experts or experts from member organizations as an alternative to expensive consultants, aiming to maintain transparency and consistent expertise. France also requested additional clarity on the validation procedures for achievements and measures implemented to ensure transparency. Furthermore, France proposed a reduction in the budget for the initial phase, taking into account the absence of immediate outputs during this specific period.

The European Commission thanked the Secretariat and acknowledged the significance of the Atlas initiative. The European Commission emphasized the need to integrate this effort with other ongoing biodiversity and ecosystem initiatives at national, European, and global levels, including GEOBON. The European Commission noted that GEO activities have been historically facilitated and supported by the Secretariat, but not directly managed by them. The European Commission inquired about the funding strategy for the new initiative, stating that their programme relies on competitive calls for proposals and may not be able to provide immediate support. However, the European Commission pointed out a topic in their Work Programme for 2024 that aligns with this initiative, an EU-China flagship programme focusing on biodiversity and climate. The European Commission suggested exploring this opportunity as a means to support the Atlas.

The United States offered overall support for the proposed Atlas initiative, appreciating its cross-cutting nature and integration with existing Work Programme efforts. The United States stressed the importance of identifying dependencies to ensure that the new initiative complements and supports other ongoing activities without duplication. The United States emphasized the significance of self-sustainability, where resources are brought in by partners, reducing dependence on traditional sources of funding. The United States expressed interest in participating in the initiative, either through funding or subject matter expertise, and eagerly anticipated the concept note that will outline the project's near-term development and sustained expectations.

Senegal expressed optimism that the Atlas would offer important data and tools to aid their endeavors in effectively implementing the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and highlighted the importance of conveying the Atlas use-cases for countries during GEO Week.

The GEO Secretariat thanked the Executive Committee and informed that primary use cases will be supporting countries' reports to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and System of Environmental Economic Accounting (SEEA). The GEO Secretariat plans to gradually expand to other use cases and involve pilot countries to test the Atlas, workshops will be used to engage them for on-ground action and participation. GEO BON, GEO-LDN, and Earth observations for Ecosystem Accounting are involved in the project's design, showcasing GEO's central expertise. An independent evaluation will validate achievements to meet donor expectations and secondments for positions will help control the budget. Initially, the project will be co-located within the Secretariat during

the startup phase before becoming an independent activity, following the model of successful GEO flagships.

**Outcomes:**

- The GEO Secretariat presented an updated document on the Global Ecosystems Atlas that included the vision, work streams, timeline and budget for the initial design phase and sought financial and in-kind support from the Executive Committee members;
- The Executive Committee requested and received clarification from the GEO Secretariat on the role of existing relevant GEO activities, planned user engagement, and prospective operating modes involving co-financing for the Atlas development;
- The Executive Committee was appreciative of GEO Secretariat's coordination effort and called for a fair and transparent management framework of the Atlas;
- The European Commission suggested a funding opportunity under the European Horizon call related to the European-China cooperation framework on biodiversity.

**3.3 GIDTT – next steps**

Ms Paola De Salvo (GEO Secretariat Information Technology Officer) presented the Terms of Reference and membership details of the GEO Infrastructure Development Task Team (GIDTT). Ms De Salvo outlined the revised timeline for deliverables and the criteria for the GIDTT membership, with a focus on representation from organizations acknowledged within the GEO governance. Members may also represent multiple communities, regional GEOs, GEO Work Programme activities, or other relevant stakeholders. The GIDTT composition aims to involve all regional GEOs and communities related to the GEO infrastructure and Ms De Salvo highlighted areas where additional members are needed. GIDTT will be active from 2023 to 2025, and members are required to actively participate in meetings. Additionally, Ms De Salvo mentioned the successful Open Data Open Knowledge Workshop, which gathered valuable community feedback influencing the future direction of GIDTT.

The European Commission welcomed the new plan for GIDTT new planning, emphasizing the significance of strong participation from organisations managing big data infrastructure, notably mentioning Copernicus data space. The European Commission stressed the need for expertise (such as the European Organization for the Exploitation of Meteorological Satellites) within GIDTT to comprehend the operations of these big data infrastructures and explore their integration with GEO's activities.

The United States concurred with the comment from the European Commission and emphasized the importance of including not just data providers but also data managers in the membership. The United States recognized the challenge of regional variations in resources and capabilities, particularly among national space agencies, and proposed addressing this issue through internal coordination within the Americas Caucus. The United States also shared concerns about the large size of the team (40+ members) and its potential impact on execution. Regarding resources, the United States inquired about whether the task team is fully resourced and raised a concern about the expectation of all

members attending meetings and providing their own resources for participation, particularly considering the travel costs for some members like users or cloud service providers. The United States asked if the secretariat plans to provide support for travel expenses in such cases.

China supported the proposal for GIDTT but suggested some potential improvements. Firstly, China recommended optimizing the structure of the Working Group by adopting a higher-level architecture Working Group supplemented by several sub working groups. This would facilitate comprehensive organization and coordination for both a detailed component design and overall infrastructure planning. Secondly, China agreed with the concerns raised by the European Commission and the United States about the current composition and representation of the Working Group. China suggested further clarification and improvements in the representation of different member types, especially regarding users' representation, to ensure a rational and comprehensive engagement. Lastly, China proposed appropriate adjustments to the attendance rate to accommodate different time zones, ensuring continuity and effective engagement of users in online discussions.

France congratulated the Secretariat on the successful Open Data Open Knowledge meeting. France suggested clarifying the meaning of “technical assessment of the architecture proposed by GEO Secretariat” in the text, as it was not entirely clear during the presentation. If there is no GEO plenary in 2024 (which is currently under discussion), France recommended adjusting the planning in the text accordingly.

Japan commended the GEO Secretariat for progressing with the development of the new GEO infrastructure, considering it crucial for the next Strategy. Japan suggested establishing consultation opportunities between GIDTT and the Post-2025 Working Group. Additionally, Japan emphasized the importance of deep collaboration and discussions with data providers who have already contributed to the GEO Infrastructure. Finally, Japan recommended including data providers and users in the GIDTT team.

Ms De Salvo expressed gratitude for the support and feedback received on the development of GIDTT. Ms De Salvo welcomed the inclusion of high-level experts from organizations like the United Nations Satellite Centre (UNOSAT) while striving to maintain a manageable group size. Ms De Salvo highlighted the successful use of the subgroup model in the Data Working Group, expressing confidence that it will work well for GIDTT. Ms De Salvo emphasized the need for consultation with the Post-2025 working group and data providers and acknowledged the necessity of clarifying the technical assessment while remaining flexible to adapt the timeline based on future arrangements of GEO plenaries.

**Outcomes:**

- The GEO Secretariat presented the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the GEO Infrastructure Development Task Team (GIDTT);
- The Executive Committee thanked the GEO Secretariat for the presentation and the revised ToR;
- The Executive Committee encouraged the inclusion of big data organizations (data providers) in GIDTT to share their expertise;

- **Decision:** The Executive Committee approved the GIDTT updated Terms of Reference;
- The following document was approved:
  - ExCom-61.12: GIDTT Updated Terms of Reference.

### 3.4 Ministerial Summit and GEO Week

Ms Lulekwa Makapela (South Africa) and the GEO Secretariat, including Mr Samuel Nuttall (GEO Secretariat Strategic Communications Specialist), Ms Nicoleta Panta (GEO Secretariat Chief of Partnerships and Communication), and Ms Madeeha Bajwa (GEO Secretariat Chief Work Programme Coordinator), jointly presented an update on the Ministerial Summit and GEO Week.

Mr Nuttall discussed the agenda for the upcoming GEO Week and highlighted the inclusion of workshops alongside flash talks and showcase sessions. The event received a significant number of applications, leading to the merging of sessions. Additionally, a web page with information regarding the programme, its registration, the exhibition and accommodation has been launched. The presentation also covered the concept of the GEO booth, which will showcase case studies from the highlights report through displays and video panels. General registration for the event is open, and the deadline for registration is 6 October due to the requirements of the South Africa State Security Service.

Ms Bajwa presented an overview of the detailed Plenary agenda for the upcoming GEO Week. The plenary will begin with opening statements from the Executive Committee Co-Chairs and the Secretariat Director, with additional opening remarks from the United Nations Secretary-General's envoy on youth. The agenda includes various items such as the approval of the meeting agenda and the previous plenary's draft report, welcoming new GEO members and Participating Organizations, and a session on the Post-2025 strategy, which will be formally adopted. During the plenary, inspiring statements will be made by different representatives, including youth and indigenous representatives. Two-panel discussions are scheduled, focusing on the GEO Global Ecosystems Atlas and the Global Heat Resilience Service. The plenary will conclude with a gala dinner, during which awards will be distributed to the GEO Awardees in two categories. The first day of the Plenary is open to all participants, along with the morning of the second day, which features sessions on GEO achievements and engagement with countries, and showcases strategies and initiatives that foster robust national engagement in GEO. The plenary will conclude with a closed session to discuss GEO plenary business and decisions. Key topics to be addressed include adopting the foundational tasks of the GEO Work Programme, endorsing the 2024 secretariat budget, and welcoming new members, Participating Organizations, and Associates before transitioning to the ministerial segment.

Mr Nuttall provided a brief overview of the upcoming Ministerial Summit, with a focus on the Post-2025 Strategy and opportunities for ministers to address other issues. The summit will feature a session on advocacy and implementation to discuss how the declaration will be taken forward to other events, such as the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UNFCCC taking place at the end of November 2023. A notable addition to the Summit is the inclusion of a youth panel. A workshop comprising young people from South Africa will be held in October 2023 to help draft a youth declaration, which will then be presented

during the Summit. This declaration is intended to represent the perspectives of young people interested in geosciences and Earth observation.

Ms Lulekwa Makapela provided an update on the current status of ministerial nominations for the upcoming Ministerial Summit. So far, there have been 26 nominations, distributed across different regions, with 8 from the Americas, 6 from Africa, 5 from Oceania, and 6 from Europe. South Africa has been actively contacting principals directly to identify relevant ministers, with a specific focus on the Africa region. South Africa recently conducted a successful ministerial briefing in Pretoria on June 14<sup>th</sup>, which received positive responses and generated interest from missions in understanding the role of GEO. To further engage relevant stakeholders, South Africa plans to hold an additional briefing in Brussels through their missions and contacts in those regions. In conjunction to the mission briefings hosted by South Africa, the GEO Secretariat has also hosted one briefing, hosted by the US Mission and is in the process of planning a second one to facilitate effective engagement and participation in the Ministerial Summit. Regarding speaking slots during the Ministerial Summit, Ms Panta requested that the offices of the ministers confirm their participation and interest in a speaking slot as soon as possible, particularly given the registration deadline.

The United States sought clarification on the distinction between a showcase and a workshop and asked about the level of engagement expected from members for these sessions. Secondly, the United States asked about the inclusion of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) implementation or recommendations, emphasizing their previous efforts to ensure diversity in panellists. Lastly, considering the need to allocate speaking slots for ministers, the United States recommended establishing a clear deadline for the submission of speaker requests rather than using a first-come-first-served approach.

China proposed integrating “Earth intelligence” with the “Post 2025 Strategy” in Ministerial Summit agenda items 2 and 3 to present a cohesive vision for the future. China also recommended allocating a specific slot in Item 3 to review past achievements, providing an opportunity to showcase accomplishments and enhance ministers' understanding. Regarding the press conference, China suggested that the participation of the Co-Chairs should not be mandatory. China emphasized that during the Ghana conference, only the Leading Co-Chair and the host country conducted the press conference.

The European Commission acknowledged the dedicated efforts of the local organizing committee and Ministerial Working Group. The European Commission's primary objective is to establish a robust and prominent presence at the event, involving the active participation of the European GEO community. To realize this aim, the European Commission intends to support diverse activities, provide speakers, and introduce the European Space Agency Youth Track. Despite encountering challenges in engaging with the newly designated commissioner, the European Commission remains committed to contributing to the success of the Ministerial.

France raised concerns about the time allotted to the Co-Chairs in the opening session, emphasizing the necessity of allowing a more extended duration to ensure adequate expression of each culture's views. Secondly, France observed that Day 3 includes a planned plenary session open to a wider audience, but highlighted that only plenary

delegates from members would be able to make decisions. Lastly, France expressed apprehensions regarding the strategy, noting that feedback had been received from only 11 countries. France cautioned that conducting an open session under these circumstances could carry risks and recommended further consultation and agreement among all GEO members before proceeding.

The Ministerial Working Group sought guidance from the Executive Committee regarding funding for ministers' travel to Cape Town. The Executive Committee expressed concerns about the significant costs and logistical challenges involved, including ticket expenses, hotel accommodations, and security arrangements. The Executive Committee proposed prioritizing the allocation of the limited travel funds to support participants from developing countries, with a focus on promoting diversity and inclusivity.

Ms Yana Gevorgyan (GEO Secretariat Director) noted that a recommendation was received and the Secretariat would therefore be including permanent mission representatives in correspondence with GEO principals during missions. This measure is expected to enhance the visibility of the revised draft strategy among various government entities. Ms Gevorgyan further pointed out that the Rules of Procedure dictate that the Executive Committee should extend invitations to GEO Associates for their participation in the plenary. Ms Gevorgyan then sought the Executive Committee's concurrence for the Secretariat to send an invitation message to GEO Associates, encouraging and emphasizing their active participation and contribution to discussions as part of the inclusive and participatory GEO vision. Furthermore, in response to the United States' intervention, Mr Nuttall confirmed that the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) criteria have been forwarded to the session hosts and will be made available on the website.

**Outcomes:**

- The GEO Secretariat and South Africa presented an update on the preparation for upcoming GEO Week and Ministerial 2023, including the details of the draft agenda for the Plenary and an overview of the Ministerial Summit:
  - Noting the structure of the Summit is framed around the Post-2025 Strategy;
  - Noting the addition of a new component to Ministerial Summit, namely the youth panel and declaration, to amplify youth voices on Earth observations;
  - Noting that there are EDI guidelines provided to session hosts.
- The Executive Committee was informed that the end of registration for GEO Week is a month in advance, in line with the requirements of the South Africa Security Agency;
- The Executive Committee expressed gratitude for the progress made in the preparation for the GEO Week and Ministerial Summit and committed to supporting activities and providing experts for GEO Week;
- The Executive Committee called for a deadline for Ministerial speaker nominations for the Summit Agenda;
- The Executive Committee advised against funding Ministers' travel to GEO Week/Ministerial Summit due to associated high costs and logistics;



- The Executive Committee agreed that the Secretariat can extend an invitation to Associates to actively participate in the Plenary.

### 3.5 Future GEO Weeks

Ms Yana Gevorgyan (GEO Secretariat Director) presented a proposal to address challenges concerning the timing and branding of the main GEO Week annual event. Ms Gevorgyan's suggestion involved moving the event to coincide with Earth Day and considering new names such as the Earth Observation Summit or Earth Intelligence Summit to establish a distinct brand identity and avoid scheduling conflicts with other events. The proposed shift is advised to begin in 2025, omitting the November/autumn GEO Week in 2024, thereby allowing ample time to create an Implementation Plan. This plan would be submitted for approval at the subsequent Ministerial meeting. To facilitate the transition, Ms Gevorgyan emphasized the importance of extending the term of the Lead Co-Chair and possibly delegating budget approval to the Executive Committee.

Japan concurred with the newly proposed schedule for GEO Week in April but was hesitant to rename it “Earth Observation Summit” to avoid confusion with a Ministerial Summit. Instead, Japan suggested rebranding it as the “Ministerial Summit for Earth Observation” and proposed alternative terms like “Earth Observation Week” or “Earth Observations Conference” for non-ministerial events. Regarding the approval of the 2025 GEO Secretariat budget, Japan supported the second option of circulating the budget for members' approval. Japan preferred not to simultaneously upload both the 2024 and 2025 budgets for transparency and flexibility. Additionally, Japan recommended convening an online plenary to discuss the 2025 budget during 2024.

The United States agreed with the proposal to move the GEO plenary to the spring of 2025 and concurred with Japan's suggestion of using a name such as “Earth Information” or a similar alternative.

The European Commission concurred that it would be advantageous to engage in rebranding and fix the schedule for the GEO week in the year 2025. Nonetheless, a challenge arose due to the selected date coinciding with both Earth Day and Easter holiday on April 20th, 2025, potentially causing conflicts with school holidays in numerous countries. The European Commission contemplated the possibility of hosting the event in Brussels; however, no definite commitment has been made yet. The year 2025 holds significance as it commemorates the twentieth anniversary of the GEO.

The lead Co-Chair suggested considering the entire month rather than a specific day for flexibility.

China concurred with the proposal to adjust the timing of the GEO Week to occur a few days before or around Earth Day, intending to maximize its international impact. China highlighted the advantage of having a big event at the end of the year, as it allows for quick incorporation of important insights into the next year's work plan and budget request. China expressed concern about losing such opportunities if the event is moved to the middle of the year.

France questioned the need for a name change, as they observed that the GEO Week conference in the United States has been using a similar name for less than 5 years, while

the “GEO Week” concept has been established since 2005. France suggested discussing this matter with the United States Co-Chair to explore possible solutions.

Ms Panta highlighted that the name “GEO Week” is not under the legal ownership of GEO due to the absence of its existence as a legal entity. Ms Panta raised a significant concern regarding the potential risk of another entity using the same name, which could impact GEO’s reputation if the actions of that entity do not align with GEO objectives. Ms Panta stressed the utmost importance of taking this risk seriously, particularly in the context of rebranding.

The Executive Committee underlined the significance of officially registering the name with a reputable legal entity and recommended seeking advice from the Secretariat to explore available options in this regard.

**Outcomes:**

- The GEO Secretariat presented both, timing and branding challenges around current GEO Week planning;
- The GEO Secretariat proposed renaming and shifting GEO Week to Earth Day (April 22) as soon as 2025, skipping the autumn GEO Week in 2024, thus providing adequate time to plan the 2025 event to deliver the Post-2025 Implementation Plan;
- The European Commission informed the Executive Committee it is exploring options to host GEO Week 2025 in Brussels for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of GEO;
- **Decision:** The Executive Committee welcomed and approved the proposal to rebrand GEO Week and to move GEO Week from November to April, cautioning that the Easter holiday season usually falls in April;
- The following document was approved:
  - ExCom-61.14(Rev1): GEO Weeks 2024-2025.

## 4 SESSION 4: OTHER BUSINESS

### 4.1 Follow up: GEO Week Standard Operating Procedures

Ms Erika Alex (GEO Secretariat Chief of Staff) addressed the action item from the previous Executive Committee meeting on developing an SOP for GEO weeks. The Secretariat intends to share an updated draft of the SOP with potential volunteers who will be hosting the next GEO week. To enhance the checklist's effectiveness, the Secretariat will actively seek input and insights from previous GEO week hosts. Nevertheless, the Secretariat is aware that determining the costs associated with hosting the event may be challenging due to variations in expenses across different countries and cities.

**Outcomes:**

- **Action 4.1a:** The GEO Secretariat will send out a request to previous GEO week hosts for feedback to help develop SOP;
- **Action 4.1b:** The GEO Secretariat will develop an early draft SOP in time for GEO Week.

#### 4.2 Review of Requests to join GEO as Participating Organizations and Review of Applications for Associate status

Ms Erika Alex presented the review of requests to join GEO as Participating Organizations (PO) and the review of applications for Associates statuses. The Secretariat suggested moving forward with approval unless there are any objections or questions from the participants.

##### Outcomes:

- **Decision:** The Executive Committee approved the proposed applications
- The following documents were approved:
  - ExCom-61.16: Review of Applications for Participating Organization status;
  - ExCom-61.17: Review of Applications for Associate status.

#### 4.3 Any Other Business

No items were raised.

#### 4.4 Review of Action Items

##### Outcomes:

- The GEO Secretariat presented outcomes and actions from the meeting.

#### 4.5 Closing Remarks

The GEO Lead Co-Chair expressed gratitude to all individuals who have contributed to the preparation and success of the Executive Meeting, acknowledging the diverse range of issues that have been discussed. The GEO Lead Co-Chair conveyed a sense of optimism regarding the future and expressed anticipation for the events scheduled for November.

The United States expressed appreciation for the constructive conversations that have taken place and the advancements made in understanding the challenges ahead. The United States emphasized the need for continued collaboration to find a successful path forward.

China thanked the participants for their active involvement and stressed the need to continue advancing the construction of GEO infrastructure globally, regionally, and nationally. China encouraged engagement with developing countries and other Participating Organizations to drive GEO's development and provide observation for addressing global challenges.

The GEO Secretariat Director thanked the members for engaging constructively in the discussions, recognized that the organization is going through a time of change, and looked forward to meeting again in Cape Town.

##### Outcomes:

- The Lead Co-Chair, Co-Chairs, and Secretariat provided closing remarks.

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