



**Statement by the Committee on Earth Observation Satellites**  
**at the 13<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session of the Group on Earth Observations**  
**St Petersburg, Russian Federation**

The international Committee on Earth Observation Satellites, CEOS, coordinates observation of the Earth from space. Through the major sustained investments made by our Member and Associate Agencies, we continue to develop the space segment of the GEOSS and coordinate the availability of space-based Earth observations to GEO.

Last year, we welcomed the new strategic direction laid out in the *GEO Strategic Plan 2016-2025*.

We would like to use our statement this year to reflect on what we think is going well in the GEO community's shift to this new direction, and what needs further attention.

In terms of what is going well, we believe that:

- **The shift to thinking, acting and communicating in a 'challenge-centred' way is welcome.** This way of approaching our work will help us engage key stakeholders, such as UN agencies and international financial institutions, whom we have struggled to engage so far.
- **Changes to GEO's governance are starting to pay dividends.** We think that Participating Organizations are already lending a valuable new perspective to the work of the ExCom on important topics such as the drafting of the new GEO Engagement Strategy.
- **The new Programme Board is also starting to deliver results.** Through the Programme Board process, our work is better designed, and more focussed on convening the community across the value chain to deliver benefit.
- **The quality of GEO initiatives is starting to improve.** GEO focus on quality and delivery has elevated the quality of the contributed efforts, helping to ensure the status of GEO Initiatives and Flagships is respected and valued by stakeholders.
- **Efforts to help the GEOSEC focus its resources are working.** For example, recent efforts to re-prioritize GEO's 'Foundational Tasks' will give the GEOSEC clearer guidance on where the community needs help, while steering clear of 'micro-management'.

In terms of areas where further attention is required, our view is that:

- **The Programme Board needs to become more proactive.** In its first year, the Programme Board has focussed on 'quality assurance'. In its next years, it needs to put more focus on shaping initiatives, and connecting in the required players to make them successful. We would also like to see more attention to issues around preparation and process so that the time of members in session is put to best use.
- **The 'User Needs' foundational task needs to be reinvigorated.** The initial work by the GEO community to design the process needs to be followed up with concrete action. Successful advocacy for investment in developing and sustaining observatories depends on this work.

- **Efforts to strengthen in-situ terrestrial observations need work.** A major step forward has been made with the recognition that terrestrial observation requires special attention. This should help focus community efforts.
- **The GEO Community can do more to support the GEOSEC with suitable expertise.** The lack of domain experts at GEOSEC in key areas, like disaster resilience, has hampered efforts to convene the community to tackle important challenges. This suggestion does not absolve the GEO community as a whole of its responsibilities, but reflects the value that the GEOSEC can add in aiding coordination, communication and engagement.
- **There is good progress in support of the Sustainable Development Goals.** We note that this is a topic that needs to be advanced holistically, including through ongoing discussion at the Plenary, ExCom and Programme Board levels.
- **Cross cutting topics such as Climate Change need to be given due consideration.** In the first year of the second decade of GEO, overarching themes such as climate change and capacity building have not been given the required attention.
- **The potential of the ‘challenge-centred’ approach needs to be translated into action.** It is incumbent on the GEO community to work hard to ensure that groups we wish to engage see our initiatives as relevant, concrete, and worth doing with us.

We will continue our existing significant contributions to GEO. These contributions include: cross-cutting coordination of satellite Earth observation as the ‘space arm’ of GEO; direct support for Initiatives and Flagships; and implementation of thematic observing strategies for topics such as agriculture, disasters, carbon and water.

We will also make new contributions to support the transition to the new GEO Strategic Plan:

- Establishing a robust framework for responding to validated and prioritized thematic observation requirements arising from the User Needs activity.
- Engaging in efforts to exploit next generation data architectures, particularly as they support moves from enhancing discoverability of data to supporting exploitation of data.
- Progressing ‘Analysis Ready Data for Land’, our effort to make the vast volumes of full, free and open data about the land surface more directly usable to tackle real world challenges.

In conclusion, CEOS Agencies are fully engaged in implementing the space segment of GEOSS and will continue this support in the future.