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**Statement by the Committee on Earth Observation Satellites**

**to the 14th Plenary meeting of the Group on Earth Observations**

**Washington D.C., United States**

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.

We welcome the continued focus of the GEO Executive Committee, GEO Programme Board, GEO Secretariat and the GEO Community as a whole on reorienting GEO’s efforts towards 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 ongoing effort to think, act and communicate in a 'challenge-centred' way is welcome**. This way of approaching our work is helping us engage key stakeholders, such as UN agencies and international financial institutions, whom we have struggled to engage.
* **Changes to GEO’s governance are continuing to pay dividends**. We think that Participating Organizations are continuing to offer a valuable new perspective to the work of the ExCom as it addresses issue such as engagement of the commercial sector.
* **The new Programme Board is delivering on its mission**. The shift of the Programme Board from reviewing proposals from the community, to proactively working to support the community by creating new connections and attracting new contributors, is very welcome.
* **The establishment of a framework to encourage suitable engagement by the commercial sector is welcome**. The commercial sector will play a critical role in the work of GEO activities to innovate and trial new EO-enabled products and services. Moreover, the commercial sector will be crucial in ensuring new ideas piloted through GEO activities transition from being pilots to sustained operational delivery to users.

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

* **The ability of the GEOSEC to perform its most important work is at risk due to lack of resourcing.**  The GEOSEC provides essential services to the GEO mission including by engaging stakeholders as a strategic level on behalf of the whole community, assisting in cross-activity communication and information flow, and supporting governance bodies such as the Programme Board. Although there is some flexibility to prioritise work of the GEOSEC, the GEOSEC is not resourced sufficiently to deliver on functions which only it can deliver for the community.
* **Efforts to strengthen in-situ terrestrial observations continue to need work**. A major step forward has been made with the recognition that terrestrial observation requires special attention. An initiative-driven approach, leveraging projects with high stakeholder engagement to address identified gaps, seems most likely to drive concrete progress where ‘bottom-up approaches’ based on theoretical assessments of observation needs have not.
* **Engagement with the Sustainable Development Goals is going well, however efforts to address the other top strategic priorities need attention.** These topics need to be taken forward holistically, including through ongoing discussion at Plenary, ExCom and Programme Board levels.

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 carbon and water. We will also continue our efforts over the last few years to:

* Exploit next generation data architectures, particularly as they support moves from enhancing discoverability of data to supporting exploitation of data.
* Progress ‘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 2018 we will also:

* Pay particular attention to laying the foundations for the satellite component of an international CO2 and GHG emission monitoring system.
* Increase efforts to expand the use of observations from next generation geostationary satellites, including exploring the development of integrated Low Earth Orbit/Geostationary Earth Orbit products and data processing capabilities.
* Work to streamline and clarify linkages between CEOS and GEO, the Coordination Group on Meteorological Satellites (CGMS), and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

Each of these activities will position CEOS to continue its strong support to GEO in the future. CEOS Agencies are fully engaged in implementing the space segment of GEOSS and will continue this support in the future.