

GEO Plenary XII 11-12 November 2015, Mexico City, Mexico

Statement by South Africa

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Head of the delegation,
Department of Science and Technology, South Africa,
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11-12 November 2015

The Co-Chairs,

The Director of/ and GEO Secretariat,
Representatives of Member States and Participating Organisations
Distinguished delegates/Ladies and gentleman.

It is a great honour to speak on behalf of the South African delegation at this occasion of the twelfth Plenary and appreciate the opportunity to highlight some of the achievements and activities in support of the implementation of GEOSS.

First, we would like to thank the Government of Mexico and the GEO Secretariat for organising the GEO Plenary and the Ministerial Summit.

We would like to congratulate members that have recently joined the GEO community. We believe that this will truly cultivate and improve the diversity within our membership, which is essential for the fulfilment of our vision to build an operational and functional Global Earth Observation System of Systems.

South Africa is responsible for managing an oceans space, which is greater than its land territory. An extended continental shelf claim will double the size of the ocean geographic extent, and therefore the country has embarked on the Presidential initiative called Operation Phakisa. This initiative aims to unlock the economic potential of South Africa's oceans. Earth Observation and geospatial capabilities will play a significant role in the implementation of this initiative through the provision of EO applications, products, and services.

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South Africa has accepted to host the African Union Commission's Pan African University- Institute for Space Science (PAUSS). The process of establishing PAUSS is underway. PAUSS will play an important role in the development of Human Capital in Space Science and Technology on the African continent, and also in the implementation of the African Space Policy and Strategy.

The South African National Space Agency (SANSA) continues to proactively contribute to the GEO societal benefit areas through satellite data dissemination, human capital development and development of value added products. In partnership with China and Brazil, South Africa through SANSA will be contributing to the data democracy objectives of GEO by the provision of CBERS 4 data to the SADC countries and has already started receiving the CBERS 4 data at its ground receiving station. Progress has already been made in partnering with SADC MESA project to advance this initiative. SANSA will further the data democracy goal by processing and disseminating archived SPOT data older than 5 years in support of the SPOT Heritage Program announced a year ago by CNES. The space agency also continues to expand its human capital development activities through its participation in international capacity building initiatives such as CEOS Working Group on Capacity Building and Data Democracy (WG CapD) and the ESA funded TIGER program. In 2015 SANSA hosted more than 25 SADC participants at the CEOS WG CapD training workshop that was aimed at capacitating the participants on the applications of SRTM data and on the applications of remote sensing in flood modelling.

We continue our participation on the Land Cover for Africa initiative, and we have actively assembled our stakeholders to produce and launch the latest South African Land Cover map (NLC 2013/14). South Africa has also recently adopted the ISO 1944 to be SANS 1944-2-2014 Land Cover Meta Language (LCML).

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South Africa is active in GEOGLAM where we provide a monthly report on the country's crop outlook dependant on prevailing weather patterns. Currently, South Africa is experiencing devastating drought conditions associated with the effects of El Nino phenomenon affecting agricultural yields and thus, threatening food security. In response, the government is implementing short, medium, and long-term strategies geared at reducing the severity of impacts of not only this but future droughts. These strategies enable government to quickly identify, prioritize, and react to severely affected communities. They include near real-time monitoring of crops as well as grazing stresses, and developing technologies, which maximize use of the little available moisture as well as diversifying operations at the farm level such as reducing production risks via drought tolerant and early maturing crops/animal varieties.

South Africa remains committed to the promotion and coordination of EO initiatives and activities on the African continent through the advancement and implementation of data sharing and data management principles underpinned by the need for human capital and sustainable technical infrastructure.

We believe that the challenge of active participation and contribution to GEOSS by the African Member States and Participating Organisations will be addressed through the empowerment, strengthening of national and regional coordination mechanisms through the AfriGEOSS initiative. We are all aware that the AfriGEOSS initiative serves as a platform to facilitate the coordination of existing and new EO initiatives on the African continent. South Africa reiterates its commitment to continue to resource the GEO Secretariat in respect of an AfriGEOSS co-ordinator and the implementation of AfriGEOSS. We would like to encourage Members to participate and partner with us in making AfriGEOSS a success.

Finally, South Africa pledges its continued support for GEO as it embarks upon its next 10 year journey. In this journey, we encourage GEO to focus on

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strengthening the coordination of in-situ systems; user engagement to understanding user needs; clear articulation of the value of GEO to our political masters; and strong connection with the SDGs and the UN Organisations programmes.

I thank you, Chair.