

GEO Ministerial Declaration

This document is submitted to the Plenary for information.

Group on Earth Observations | 2023 Cape Town Declaration

[1] We, Ministers of GEO Members and Ministerial representatives, issue this Cape Town Declaration endorsing the Group on Earth Observations (GEO) for its third decade and its vital mission.

New World: The Future Awaits

[2] We recognize there is greater attention to sustainability in building a more resilient future and that Earth observations (EO) play key roles in enabling that future. Tackling the complex, interconnected challenges facing us from local to global levels requires solutions that are also interconnected. Our decisions for a thriving future require knowledge and insights on interlinked human and natural systems.

[3] We appreciate that public and private EO capabilities from multiple sources continue to expand and evolve. This proliferation of sensors, data, applications, and analytic tools as well as data sharing, computing, and open-source developments underscore the value of EO. These ever-growing resources expand opportunities for relevant, accessible, and actionable information for sound decision making.

[4] We also recognize that barriers to access and use of EO persist and are not limited to geography. Increasing equity and inclusivity with a greater diversity of voices and greater attention to engagement and capacity development are critical to enabling our sustainable and resilient future.

New GEO: In the World's Service

[5] This is a transformational moment for GEO. The Group has a unique role to lead the development of integrated EO solutions and actionable information for decision making. GEO can also guide the use of EO in the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements (MEA). The complex challenges facing us require urgency in our actions. We call on GEO to be bold and ambitious in achieving greater impacts.

[6] To this end, we endorse the GEO Post-2025 Strategy: *Earth Intelligence for All*. This Strategy continues GEO's leadership in coordinating and enabling the provision and use of EO across scales, sectors, and geographies. The Strategy also introduces pathways for GEO to co-produce products and services with users and for users. The Strategy draws on insights from EO sourced from across the value chain and covers multiple thematic areas to inform strategic decisions and empower society.

[7] We recognize and support that this new direction requires GEO to adapt its operating model. GEO needs effective approaches to financing, accountability, and programme and project management in serving our collective purpose and expanding benefits globally.

[8] Our endorsement of the Strategy is buoyed by recent progress and builds on solid foundations. We highlight the collaborative strides GEO has made in advancing openness and the collection and use of EO. We applaud the progress in implementing the *GEO Strategic Plan 2016-2025*, the priorities in the *Canberra Ministerial Declaration*, and the many achievements of the *GEO Work Programme*.

[9] We praise the adoption of the *GEO Statement on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)*. GEO's resolve to develop an ever-more dynamic, diverse, and inclusive community is laudable. We commend the *GEO Statement on Open Knowledge*. Our efforts for openly-licensed components to hasten collaboration and broaden inclusivity in community endeavors serve to accelerate innovation. We acclaim the greater uptake of co-design and co-development principles. GEO's advancement of these collaborative approaches builds trust, legitimacy, and capacity.

[10] We note that the Covid-19 pandemic changed our world. It also acted as a catalyst to accelerate our understanding of connections among health, environmental, and societal data. We can continue to build on the opportunities it created and exhibited for EO to provide actionable insights.

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[11] We highlight the enhanced organization of coordination mechanisms from global to regional to national to local levels. We commend the progress in sharing beneficial practices, place-specific collaboration, capacity building, and engagement opportunities with youth and indigenous communities. We applaud the connections and on-going partnerships with bodies managing conventions and MEAs, such as the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, and the Ramsar Convention, among others.

[12] We emphasize that these items of praise and progress will strongly serve the next phase of GEO's endeavor. We commit to evolving our Group as necessary to become increasingly relevant and of ever greater service. We stress the need to focus on the future, so we are best prepared and structured to address known, on-going challenges, and the ones waiting for us.

New Commitments: Paths to Thrive

[13] As GEO moves into its next decade, we resolve that new commitments and actions are required to fulfill the Strategy, be more attuned to users, and fully enable EO benefits.

[14] *To improve engagement and service,*

[15] We re-affirm the intergovernmental nature of GEO along with our multisectoral partnership across governments, civil society, companies, and other organizations. This unique combination allows GEO to leverage perspectives and capabilities to anticipate trends and be agile in addressing challenges. We encourage efforts to maintain strong relations among GEO membership, including being responsive to Members' needs and inclusive of Participating Organizations and Associates.

[16] We reaffirm our commitment to support international MEAs. We recommit to advancing the implementation of the Paris Climate Change Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the New Urban Agenda.

[17] We recognize GEO's focus to increase the use of EO to better inform the sustainability of our oceans and lands and state of our atmosphere. We commit to expanding EO roles in addressing the urgencies of biodiversity loss, pollution, climate change, land degradation, and other challenges.

[18] *To increase equity, ensure the benefits of EO are realized at all levels, and expand demand,*

[19] We reaffirm our commitment to open and free data exchange, and we continue to encourage governments to increase free access to EO created using public resources. We strongly encourage flexible, multi-user licensing agreements for nongovernmental data to broaden exposure to EO, accelerate innovation, and expand use to achieve greater sustainability sooner. We also highlight the need to integrate new technologies, including artificial intelligence and machine learning, into Earth observation solutions. We underscore the need for inclusive access to service provision.

[20] We stress the importance of increasing engagement and building capacity, especially in the global South. We re-commit ourselves to lowering barriers for everyone who might contribute to and benefit from the derivation of EO-based knowledge and insights. We charge GEO with pursuing and advancing co-design and co-development as much as possible and with shared approaches. We endorse efforts of GEO activities to liaise and leverage existing infrastructures and data portals to bridge the digital and information divides.

[21] *To succeed with our principles of equality, diversity, and inclusivity,*

[22] We call on GEO to fully address and embed EDI principles in all GEO undertakings. We call for steps to amplify the voices of indigenous peoples, youth, women and other groups whose potential to contribute to EO solutions has yet to be fully realized. We welcome GEO's efforts to foster greater participation of new members and individuals. We resolve to develop an ever-more synergetic and inclusive community that enhances a sense of belonging and connections for everyone.

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[23] We reaffirm the integral role of young people in data-driven economies and as catalysts for sustainable development. We encourage GEO to integrate youth to a much greater extent in our pursuits as well as trainings and mentorship to support career opportunities and their contributions.

[24] *To fully realize the potential of GEO and the Post-2025 GEO Strategy,*

[25] We endorse the concept of Earth Intelligence to apply knowledge and insights to support evidence-based decision making. We charge GEO with developing an implementation plan to guide progress in executing the Strategy and with undertaking robust resource mobilization efforts to ensure the partnership's long-term financial sustainability.

[26] We call upon GEO to increase and improve regional, national, and local networks. We must increase our collective ability for sincere connections with stakeholders within and between geographical regions in ways that work best for them. We resolve to be more open in global partnerships and multilateralism and become more inclusive of all actors. We recognize the strength and importance of contributions and expertise from multi-sectoral, multi-disciplinary partners from all geographies as well as the need for due diligence processes in accordance with GEO principles. We resolve to prioritize networking and opportunities for cross-fertilization.

[27] We support the prioritization of Work Programme activities and resource mobilization efforts towards strategic or transformative programmes as called for in the Post-2025 Strategy. These programmes generate high-added value towards policy goals, support sustained services for decision making, build capacity, and advance equity.

[28] To this end, we welcome efforts to strengthen existing initiatives and call on the GEO membership to implement the 2023-2025 Work Programme. We also welcome the development of new initiatives, such as the Global Ecosystems Atlas and Global Heat Resilience Service, supporting the implementation of MEAs and endeavors like the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and Early Warnings for All.

Onward

[29] We appreciate the valuable contributions made by GEO Members, Participating Organizations, and Associates leading to, and following from, our Summit. We commit to continuing to work together to achieve the priorities outlined in this Declaration and the new Strategy. We resolve to reconvene within four years to review and reaffirm GEO's progress.

[30] We express our gratitude to the many participants from around the world for dedicating resources, time, and talent to EO and their societal benefits. We welcome new members in advancing GEO's cause in pursuing the significant challenges and opportunities. Finally, we extend deep appreciation to the Government of South Africa and the City of Cape Town for graciously hosting this productive GEO Ministerial Summit.