

GEO Summit, Session 3: Adoption of the Ministerial Declaration

Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Germany, Ambassador Thomas Fitschen

Geneva 17th January 2014

Honorable Ministers, distinguished Delegates, Heads of Participating Organizations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my and my delegation's particular pleasure to join all of you at this Summit of the Group on Earth Observations in Geneva. And it is with the same pleasure that we support the Declaration just read out by State Secretary Oberle. We also thank him and everyone else in the team of our host country Switzerland for the invitation and the excellent preparation of this whole GEO week.

Germany firmly believes that GEO will remain a vital international initiative for Earth Observations through global partnership. We acknowledge significant advances in the global availability of Earth Observation data and products both through technological means and through open data policies. The Special GEO Initiatives undertaken under our 10-Year Implementation Plan begin to close gaps still existing in the global monitoring systems, hence starting to deliver real societal benefit. The title of our Declaration – “Integrating Observations to Sustain our Planet” – captures this in one crisp and precise sentence.

And yet, there is still much to do. Germany appreciates the evaluations made of GEO and the considerations concerning a long-term global Earth Observation System of Systems beyond 2015. It is most important that our efforts are indeed sustained and strengthened further.

The Declaration rightly recalls some of the unique features of GEO that are key to its success, and that need to be preserved: its character as an international partnership that brings together states and international partner organizations and stakeholders of all kinds; the guiding principles of collaboration which form the basis of this cooperation; and the possibility to adapt its mandate according to practical needs through a regular renewal process.

We are therefore confident that GEO will take the chance of a renewed mandate to implement some structural enhancements. Of particular importance is a clear and complementary cooperation with relevant international organizations and programs, especially of the United Nations. The Group on Earth Observations should also pay more attention to the maintenance and necessary improvements of the Global Earth Observations infrastructure and the data availability.

GEO should continue to cooperate internationally on a voluntary basis, but for that purpose we need optimized internal governance as well as sustained resource commitments. Our challenge in the future is to develop a new Implementation Plan and to broaden the global coverage of GEO and GEOSS data.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Geneva Declaration reflects our achievements so far, and it offers a range of measures for improvement. Let me assure you that Germany for its part will remain a reliable partner in the continuation of GEO. In 2014 we will double our voluntary contribution to the GEO Trust Fund to support specific actions of the GEO work. Germany will also facilitate the dispatch of a Junior Professional Officer to work in the GEO Secretariat on the climate Societal Benefit Area.

Finally, GEO is built on the commitment of all of us. It will only become a full success story if all Members, Participating Organizations and Observers will play an active role to realize the GEO tasks and targets. Let us work together in the Group on Earth Observations to facilitate the comprehensive global monitoring of our planet. The exhibition and the various presentations here in Geneva which are open to the public give an impressive testimony of what has already been achieved, and they underline GEO's commitment to providing "free and open data" and to support capacity building.

Thank you very much for your valuable efforts to the continuation of the Global Earth Observation System of Systems.