

## Group on EO 2023 Cape Town Declaration

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

### ***New World: The Future Awaits***

[2] We recognize the greater attention to sustainability in building a more resilient future and that Earth observations (EO) play key roles in enabling that future. Multiple, interconnected challenges face us from local to global levels and our solutions must also be interconnected. We note that multilateral agreements increasingly call for integrated action to address environmental, economic, and social challenges. Our decisions for a thriving future require knowledge and insights on interlinked natural and human systems.

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

[4] We recognize that barriers to access and use of EO persist and are not limited to geography. Increasing GEO's inclusivity with a greater diversity of voices and greater attention to engagement and capacity building will be critical to enabling our sustainable and resilient future.

### ***New GEO: In the World's Service***

[5] This is a transformational moment for GEO. The challenges from local to global levels, pace of technical changes, and opportunities for greater equity drive urgency in our actions. GEO has a unique role to guide the use of EO in building integrated solutions to our complex challenges. We call on GEO to be bold and ambitious in achieving greater impacts through EO.

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

[7] We recognize and support that this new direction requires us to adapt our operating model. We will need effective approaches to financing, accountability, and programme and project management in serving our collective purpose and expanding Earth observation roles and 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 creates a sense of belonging for all individuals. We commend the *GEO Statement on Open Knowledge*. Our efforts for openly-licensed components to hasten collaboration and broaden inclusivity in community endeavors expand and 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 highlight the organization of coordination mechanisms from regional to national to local levels. We commend the progress in sharing beneficial practices, place-specific collaboration, capacity development, and engagement opportunities with youth and indigenous communities. We applaud the engagement and on-going partnerships with bodies managing conventions and environmental agreements, such as the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, UN Convention to Combat Desertification and Ramsar Convention, among others.

[11] 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.

[12] We emphasize that these items of praise and progress serve as substantial foundations for the next phase of GEO's endeavor. 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 commit to leverage our history and strengths and to evolve our Group as necessary to become increasingly relevant and of ever greater service. New commitments and actions are required to fulfill the Strategy and to be more attuned to users.

[14] *To improve engagement and commitment,*

[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 welcome the commitment to maintain strong relations with GEO membership, including being responsive to Members' needs and inclusive of Participating Organizations and Associates.

[16] We reaffirm our commitment to support international multi-lateral agreements. 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 Earth observation roles in addressing the urgencies of biodiversity loss, pollution, climate change, land degradation, and other challenges.

[18] *To ensure the benefits of EO are realized at all levels and to 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 underscore the need for inclusive access to service provision.

[20] We stress the importance of 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. 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 Earth observation solutions has yet to be fully realized. We welcome GEO's efforts to foster greater participation of new members and individuals. We resolve to be more open in global partnerships and multilateralism and become more inclusive of all actors.

[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 the Post-2025 GEO Strategy,*

[25] We endorse the commitment of *Earth Intelligence for All* to apply insights to inform 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, increasing our collective ability to connect stakeholders within and between geographical regions in ways that work best for them. We recognize the strength and importance of contributions and expertise from multi-sectoral, multi-disciplinary partners from all geographies. We resolve to ensure that networking and opportunities for cross-fertilization are prioritized to help enhance the objectives.

[27] *Under the Summit theme of "The Earth Talks,"*

[28] We call on the GEO membership to support implementation of the 2023-2025 Work Programme. We stress the importance of national engagement in GEO and bridging gaps across geographic levels.

[29] We support the prioritization of Work Programme activities and resource mobilization efforts towards transformative programmes that generate high-added value towards policy goals, support sustained services for decision making, build capacity and advance diversity and inclusivity. To this end, we welcome efforts to both strengthen existing initiatives and develop new services, such as the Global Ecosystems Atlas and Global Heat Resilience Service, that embody these characteristics and seek to support multilateral agreements and initiatives such as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and Early Warnings for All.

### **Onward**

[30] 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 in [four] years to review and reaffirm GEO's progress.

[31] 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. We extend deep appreciation to the Government of South Africa and the City of Cape Town for graciously hosting this productive GEO Ministerial Summit.