



UNITED NATIONS  
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS  
STATISTICS DIVISION

**10<sup>th</sup> UN Regional Cartographic Conference for the Americas  
New York, 19 – 23 August 2013**

### **Opening Statement**

Mr. Stefan Schweinfest,  
Acting-Director  
United Nations Statistics Division

*[check upon delivery]*

[Thank you, Mr. President]

**Distinguished Delegates and Observers,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

On behalf of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, it is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the Tenth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for the Americas. In particular, I would like to convey the greetings and best wishes of our Under-Secretary General Mr. Wu Hongbo. He accords great importance to the development of solid geospatial information, especially in the context of sustainable development.

At the outset, I would like to recognize that this is the 10<sup>th</sup> Regional Cartographic Conference for the Americas. The first conference was held 37 years ago in March 1976 in Panama. An important milestone was the creation of the Permanent Committee on Spatial Data Infrastructure (PC-IDEA) in 2000, in pursuance to a resolution of the 6<sup>th</sup> UN Regional Cartographic Conference. The first four conferences were held over a period of two weeks and in 1993 they were reduced to one week. This year's conference has the potential to mark yet another milestone as you will consider a proposal to align PC-IDEA and this conference with the global architecture to better address future regional and global challenges.

Some of you may recall that an indirect outcome of the 9<sup>th</sup> UNRCC-A was a consultative meeting which discussed the importance of coordination of global geospatial information management and considered the creation, under the auspices of the UN, of a global intergovernmental coordinating mechanism to share information and best practices in geospatial information management. The initiation of this process in August 2009 in the wake of the 9<sup>th</sup> UNRCC-A, and the adoption of a subsequent resolution from the 18<sup>th</sup> UNRCC-AP later that year in October, resulted in the establishment of the UN Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) by ECOSOC in July 2011.

The Committee of Experts has now met three times, most recently last month in Cambridge in the United Kingdom. I will not delve into the detailed decisions and outcomes of these three sessions, as there will be a presentation on this topic later and information is available on the GGIM website. However, I will share with you an important observation that has direct relevance to our meeting here today. In each of these sessions, UN-GGIM, as a newly established global intergovernmental body, has recognized that effective forms of cooperation are taking place at the regional level. The Committee has welcomed the creation of UN-GGIM Asia-Pacific, and the progress and efforts being made towards establishing UN-GGIM Europe and UN-GGIM Arab States. The Committee also invited other regional entities, including the Americas and Africa, to consider creating similar UN-GGIM regional structures.

In this regard, it is fitting that our conference theme this year is “UN-GGIM and the Americas: Addressing Global Challenges Through Geospatial Information”. The timing for this topic is right, as the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+20, held in June 2012 in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil, marked a new milestone. Rio+20 launched a forward-looking blueprint for international cooperation that fully integrates the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Rio+20 also explicitly recognized at the highest political level that reliable and authoritative geospatial information is crucial for both sustainable development and humanitarian assistance. It provided a clear mandate for the future work of the UN Committee of Experts on GGIM. This high-level consensus also provides critical momentum and motivation for this 10th session of the UNRCC-Americas.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Turning to our agenda for this week, allow me to highlight three specific issues, namely (i) Strategy, policy, economic and institutional issues, ii) Best practices and applications, and iii) Climate change and disaster risk reduction. These are very

important topics that help address some geospatial information challenges at national, regional as well as global levels.

(i) Strategy, policy, economic and institutional issues

This topic is very relevant for PC-IDEA and the Americas region. It is generally accepted that the foundation of successful and sustainable geospatial information management initiatives rest on clear policies and accompanying strategies woven within a robust institutional framework and sound economic measures. There appears to be considerable variability in how this is presently being addressed by countries. This session will identify institutional and legal issues and examine how they are being addressed using country scenarios, review the evolving trends, evaluate whether the solutions have been successful and also provide a road map for future work.

(ii) Best practices and applications

Sharing best practices and applications among countries is a foundational component of the terms of reference of the UN Committee of Experts on GGIM. For this Conference, a session will be dedicated to this topic in order to demonstrate the value and importance of creating and maintaining reliable, accurate and authoritative geospatial information which support improved decision making and sustainable development. Existing user cases and best practices will be shared to support the value proposition of the benefits to be achieved at all levels with the application of geospatial data, modeling and analysis techniques.

(ii) Climate change and disaster risk reduction

The Rio+20 outcome document urged governments and organizations to commit to disaster risk reduction in order to enhance the resilience of cities and communities to disasters. Specifically, it recognized the importance of comprehensive hazard and risk assessments, and knowledge- and information-sharing, including reliable geospatial

information. This is a topic that is relevant for the Americas region where many of the countries are vulnerable to the effects of climate change and natural hazards such as tropical storms and hurricanes with associated storm surges, flooding, landslides and earthquakes. These events have had adverse effects on the livelihoods, physical infrastructures, the environment and the economy of many Member States. It has become imperative for governments to be able to plan, manage, mitigate and recover from such events and effects. To achieve this, access to and the use of authoritative and accurate in-situ, remote-sensed and real-time geospatial data, models and supporting applications are fundamental requirements. This session explores the ways in which Member States within the region may strengthen their collaborations using existing and new regional institutional mechanisms and resources to lead the geospatial initiatives required to manage climate change and mitigate disasters.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

In closing I wish to acknowledge the considerable efforts of the Permanent Committee on Spatial Data Infrastructure for the Americas (PC-IDEA), in particular its President, Mr. Luiz Paulo Fortes, and its Executive-Secretary, Ms Valeria Araujo and the whole executive board for their valuable contribution in advancing geospatial information management in the Americas over the past four years and for assisting with the preparation of this Conference.

I wish you a productive meeting over the next five days. I not only hope there are interesting and lively exchanges, but that you enjoy strengthening ties among your community.

Thank you.