

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

**Twentieth United Nations Regional Cartographic
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Item 4 of the provisional agenda
Report of the United Nations Committee of Experts on
Global Geospatial Information Management**

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Agenda Item 4.

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At its 47th plenary meeting on 27 July 2011, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), acknowledging the urgent need to take concrete action to strengthen international cooperation in the area of global geospatial information management, established the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) in accordance with the terms of reference contained in the annex to the resolution (see Council resolution 2011/24). ECOSOC established the Committee of Experts as the apex intergovernmental mechanism for making joint decisions and setting directions with regard to the production and use of geospatial information within national, regional and global policy frameworks. Led by United Nations Member States, UN-GGIM aims to address global challenges regarding the use of geospatial information, including in the development agenda, and to serve as a guide for global policymaking in the field of geospatial information management

In making its decision in 2011, ECOSOC stipulated that the Committee of Experts be (at least initially) “established and administered within existing resources and organized accordingly” and requested it to present to ECOSOC in 2016 “a comprehensive review of all aspects of its work and operations, in order to allow Member States to assess its effectiveness.”

In the five year period since its establishment, the Committee has made considerable progress towards its objectives and has achieved a number of significant regional and global outcomes. Member States have clearly indicated that they are not ready to reduce the significant momentum initiated by the Committee of Experts but, rather, seek to further expand the mandates of the Committee to enable it to enhance its function as the global governing body on all issues related to geospatial information.

At its fifth session, convened in New York from 5-7 August 2015, and in preparation for the comprehensive review to ECOSOC in 2016, the Committee of Experts was presented with the report of the Secretariat on the ‘Programme review of the work of the Committee of Experts during the 2011-2015 period’ for consideration (E/C.20/2015/14/Add.1). The report provided initial elements of a draft of the requested review to ECOSOC; described the considerable achievements of the Committee of Experts; identified the global, regional, national and Secretariat challenges it faces; proposed specific considerations and recommendations for the future strengthened mandate, modalities and programme of the work of the Committee of Experts; and suggested the process for finalizing the review for submission to ECOSOC in early 2016.

As starting point for discussion, and following inputs from the Bureau, the report of the Secretariat offered four initial options for the future modalities for the Committee to consider:

Option 1: No Change. Request that the Committee of Experts continues to operate and function as it has for the past five years – administered within existing resources, serviced by the very small substantive Secretariat provided by Statistics Division, DESA and Geospatial Information Section, DFS, supported by Conference Services on an ‘as available’ basis and organized in accordance with its present terms of reference.

Option 2: Confirmation. Decide to formally recognize the integral role and contribution of the Committee of Experts in the UN system, and in the post-2015 development agenda in particular, and establish it within the regular UN calendar of conferences and meetings under ECOSOC, inclusive of provision of dedicated UN Conference Management Services and support for the annual sessions of the Committee of Experts.

Option 3: Strengthened Mandate. Agree to Option 2 and, in addition, agree that the mandates and terms of reference of the Committee of Experts are revised and strengthened in order to enable it to function as the peak inter-governmental organ reporting to ECOSOC on all matters relating to

geography, geospatial information and related topics, and as the governing Member State and UN system body on geospatial information.

Option 4: Strengthened Mandate and Resources. Agree to Option 3 and, in addition, support an annual budget allocation, to be determined and tabled at an appropriate time within the UN budget cycle, which will enable the Committee of Experts to operate with the applicable substantive Secretariat support and services on global geospatial information management activities and issues.

In considering the four options described above, the report of the Secretariat noted that establishing the Committee on the regular UN calendar of conferences and meetings (Option 2) would ensure its long-term basic and minimum regular functioning. However, going forward the report considered Options 1 and 2 would not be sustainable and realistic with the growing demands and programme of work of the Committee. The report also recognized that in order for Options 3 and 4 to be viable and realized, this comes at an additional cost to the UN system and Member States. In this context the report suggested the Committee may want to consider the impact a number of ‘offsets’ that would significantly minimize the effect of any foreseeable budget implications, including consideration for a consolidation of the various inter-governmental geospatial organs within the UN system. This was particularly important to consider, as four intergovernmental geospatial organs presently report to ECOSOC under the item of Cartography in different rhythms: UN-GGIM, UNRCC-AP, UNRCC-Americas, and UNGEGN.

In making Decision 5/113 at its fifth session, and following considerable and valuable discussion by Member States, the Committee of Experts:

- a) Took note of the comprehensive report prepared by the Secretariat, which outlined in a succinct and adequate manner the considerable achievements and progress made by the Committee of Experts in the area of global geospatial information management since its establishment in 2011;
- b) Agreed that the review report to be prepared for ECOSOC should be structured fundamentally around two key messages, namely, that the Committee of Experts had operated effectively and in line with the mandate given by the Council over the past five years, producing real outputs, and that the Committee was well placed to continue to contribute even more to the work of the United Nations, especially in the context of the implementation of the sustainable development agenda and the follow-up to the World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, and recognized that the review report was seen to provide a welcome opportunity for strengthening the geospatial community’s “value proposition”, both at the global level through the Council and at the national level through Governments;
- c) Agreed that a call for strengthening the mandate of the Committee of Experts was appropriate and needed, in order for it to be at the same level as other subsidiary bodies of the Council and in order to strengthen its interaction with them, in particular the Statistical Commission, and also agreed that the role of the Committee, as an assembly of authoritative national government institutions in the field of geospatial information, was increasingly important in effectively coordinating the field of geospatial information management in the broader United Nations system;
- d) Stressed that sustainable funding for the operations of the Committee of Experts was needed to ensure its continued effectiveness, including conference support, substantive and technical secretariat support, and in particular the funding of the participation of national delegates from developing countries, in order to ensure a broad and balanced representation at the sessions of the Committee, and in this context gratefully acknowledged the efforts of the Secretariat to secure short-term funding from a variety of sources over the past years and expressed its appreciation to the various donors, noted that such short-term funding is not sustainable and also noted that some of the funding would need to be secured through the consolidation of activities and the rationalization of the various geospatial bodies within the United Nations system;

- e) Recognized that the submission of the review report to the Council in 2016 would provide a unique opportunity to strengthen the subsidiary machinery of the Council in the area of geospatial information, and requested the Bureau to reach out to the other subsidiary bodies of the Council, including the Regional Cartographic Conferences and the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, to engage in a joint reflection over the coming months, with a view to presenting a common proposal in 2016; and
- f) Approved the proposed process for finalizing the review, including: holding a global consultation in September/October 2015, based on a draft report to be prepared by the Secretariat in the light of the discussion held in the Committee, and subsequently entrusting the extended Bureau, including the Chairs of the five regional committees of United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management with finalizing the document for submission to the Council in January 2016.

To summarize, Decision 5/113 by the Committee of Experts reflected the following key points:

1. Considerable achievements and progress have been made by the Committee in the area of global geospatial information management since its establishment in 2011;
2. The Committee is well placed to continue to contribute even more to the work of the United Nations, especially in the context of the implementation of the sustainable development agenda;
3. A call for strengthening the mandate of the Committee is appropriate and needed;
4. Sustainable funding for the operations of the Committee is needed to ensure its continued effectiveness, including conference support, substantive and technical secretariat support, and funding of the participation of national delegates from developing countries;
5. Funding will need to be secured through the consolidation of activities and the rationalization of the various geospatial bodies within the United Nations system;
6. The ECOSOC review is seen to provide a welcome opportunity for strengthening the geospatial community's "value proposition", both at the global level through the Council and at the national level through Governments;
7. The submission of the review to the Council in 2016 will provide a unique opportunity to strengthen the subsidiary machinery of the Council in the area of geospatial information;
8. The Committee approved the proposed process for finalizing the review for submission to ECOSOC in January 2016.

In considering the future modalities of the Committee of Experts, strengthening the subsidiary machinery of ECOSOC in the area of geospatial information, and the rationalization of the various geospatial bodies within the United Nations system, the convening of this 20th UN Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia-Pacific provides a timely opportunity for the Conference to engage in a joint reflection and provide inputs into the ECOSOC review process. Such a reflection has recently been initiated with the UNGEGN Bureau, whom have been invited to submit a response in the coming months. UN-GGIM: Americas has its next plenary meeting in Mexico City 11-12 November 2015. In this regard, the UN-GGIM Secretariat has been invited to provide a report to the plenary meeting in the same context to the report to this Conference.

Additionally, the rationalization of the Regional Cartographic Conferences within the United Nations system needs to be considered in light of the successful establishment of UN-GGIM and the regional committee architecture, which is now complete and functioning fully and reporting directly to the Committee of Experts annually. The Regional Cartographic Conferences are convened every 3 and 4 years for five days, but have only been catering for two geographic regions and not others. Consensus among the relevant Member States is that the Regional Cartographic Conferences, although critical to

regional cartographic and geospatial development for many years, have served their valuable purpose and may have now become redundant since the establishment of the Committee of Experts and with the global regional UN-GGIM architecture now in place. By way of example, UN-GGIM: Arab States has already met twice in 2015, and the remaining four regional committees will be convening each of their annual plenary meetings within the next 6 weeks. In all situations, the agendas of the regional committee plenary meetings are naturally aligned with the global UN-GGIM agenda, and are also reviewed and modified on an annual basis in line with UN-GGIM Committee sessions and decisions.

Therefore, the Conference may wish to reflect on the present opportunity of the ECOSOC review and may wish to indicate that, in order to strengthen the subsidiary machinery of ECOSOC, the UN Regional Cartographic Conference may no longer be a practical requirement and could be removed from the UN calendar of conferences and meetings, with its mandates, obligations assumed by the Committee of Experts and its technical activities by the regional committee; UN-GGIM-AP. In this respect, UN-GGIM-AP will have greater opportunities, not only to closely and effectively engage with the global agenda and key players, but also link them as effectively to the regional and national perspectives. Therefore, it may be a valuable approach to eventually strengthening significantly the geospatial community in global, regional and national perspectives under the umbrella of UN-GGIM with ONE strong and united voice.