



UNITED NATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION

**Seventeenth United Nations Regional Cartographic
Conference for Asia and the Pacific
Bangkok, 18 – 22 September 2006**

Opening Statement

Paul Cheung, Director
United Nations Statistics Division

**SEVENTEENTH UNITED NATIONS REGIONAL CARTOGRAPHIC
CONFERENCE FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC
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**STATEMENT OF DR. PAUL CHEUNG
DIRECTOR OF THE
UNITED NATIONS STATISTICS DIVISION / DESA**

**His Excellency Dr. Pravich Rattanapian,
Minister for Science and Technology, Thailand
Distinguished Delegates and Observers, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you, on behalf of the United Nations, to this Seventeenth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Pacific. I would like to thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedules and traveling to Bangkok to participate in this important Conference. I would also like to thank the Permanent Committee on GIS Infrastructure for Asia and the Pacific (PCGIAP) and its President, Mr. Peter Holland, for their support and tireless efforts to ensure the success of this conference.

Your may recall that at the Sixteenth Conference held in Okinawa, Japan in July 2003, the delegates agreed on a set of recommendations focused on:

- *the progress made by the Permanent Committee (PCGIAP) in building a regional spatial data infrastructure for Asia and the Pacific (APSDI) and the need to continue its work by integrating national SDIs into the regional one;*
- *the need to strengthen capacity building for empowering people through training courses and associated technology transfer, including participation in international workshops;*
- *the benefit of the integration of cadastral and statistical information with topographic information in providing an appropriate basis for supporting sustainable development and environment management;*
- *a call to better assist national agencies in the development of national spatial data infrastructure and to identify the best practice procedures.*

The broad range of these resolutions highlights the importance of regional conferences. A review of the agenda for this conference similarly shows the crucial role of geo-spatial technologies and applications and the use of spatial data in addressing global, regional and national issues, including disaster management and humanitarian needs. I believe that the current Conference, bringing together specialists from Asia and the Pacific and other parts of the world, provides an important opportunity to review and assess how well geographic information has been used in dealing with these critical issues in Asia and the Pacific. It also gives an opportunity to identify the impediments and barriers that still exist, with a view to suggesting appropriate solutions in order to overcome them.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before we start to review the progress of countries of Asia and the Pacific region during the past three years, as well as to map out the way forward, it is useful to consider some key trends and important shifts which influence the development of cartography and geographic information and help to address the issues of the current agenda.

First:

The recent technological developments, including new High-resolution Sensors, Global Positioning Systems (GPS), Geographical Information Systems (GIS), Location-based Services (LBS) and Web-based tools are revolutionizing cartography, surveying and mapping in fundamental ways. Geographic data are now more easily collected, disseminated, accessed and manipulated by multiple providers and users. Their integration with a variety of other data, including demographic and socio-economic data, help create relevant information for better decision-making.

Geographic information is indeed a growing activity, with applications in many sectors: regional planning, land management, environment and natural resources, health care and emergencies, disaster management, transportation and urban systems. In the commercial sphere it has clear uses in site analysis, marketing-type studies, as well as in

most of the service sector activities. Increasingly, these geographic information applications have moved from the marketing and research areas into core management tools and strategic decision-making.

Second:

Most studies show that the collection and management of geographic data can be costly. Moreover, the development and maintenance of geographic databases is often expensive and time consuming. It is therefore necessary to minimize duplication of effort and data redundancy by encouraging the sharing of basic data. Spatial Data Infrastructure has emerged as a valuable solution.

Indeed, a National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI) is coming to be regarded as a fundamental part of the national infrastructure. It can be seen as being as important as physical infrastructure assets such as roads, communications networks, and other public utilities. It is now widely accepted that developing national spatial data infrastructures will better facilitate the availability and access to spatial data for governmental organizations, the private sector, universities and civil society in general. In this context, a major shift from natural monopolies providing a public good to a new environment characterized by privatization and economic competition and efficiency is emerging. Therefore, National Mapping Agencies need to consider their position in the spatial data community particularly regarding supply of and access to geo-spatial data.

It is becoming clear that the major barriers and impediments to harnessing geographic information will not be technical ones but rather institutional and organizational ones. National Mapping Agencies and land survey departments may need to review their position in the spatial data community and develop policies and practices to bring together a higher level of coordination. It must be led by a desire to cooperate with one another, and to create, share and disseminate geographic data and related standards.

Third:

The last issue I would like to address is related to some important UN activities undertaken to promote geographic information:

1) The UN Statistics Division is working to forge ties between the UN Regional Cartographic Conferences and the Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), advocating that cartography, GIS and Geographical Names are crucial to the promotion of geographic information. For example, resolutions were adopted at recent regional cartographic conferences, recognizing the importance of standardized and consistent geographical names as a fundamental component of national spatial data infrastructures.

2) More specifically, the UN Statistics Division is supporting the use of GIS in census mapping operations, including the appropriate use of GPS and satellite imagery for spatial data collection and demarcation of statistical enumeration areas. In the last decade, the Statistics Division has promoted the development of geographical information systems for population and demographic statistics in developing countries through technical cooperation projects. The United Nations had published a handbook on “GIS and digital mapping for population and housing censuses”. It will be revised soon to take latest developments on board. I would like to assure you, therefore, of our continued involvement and support in this area.

3) The United Nations as a system is also improving its cooperation in the field of geographic information. As you may know in March 2000 an inter-agency Working Group was established in order to coordinate geographic information activities within the UN, including the development of a global geographic database. This demonstrates the importance the UN places in the development of geographic information.

4) The United Nations will continue to support the functioning of the regional network on geographic information. The creation in 1994 of the Permanent Committee on Geographic Information System for Asia and the Pacific (PCGIAP), pursuant to a resolution adopted at the 13th Conference in Beijing has led to greater regional integration on geographic information systems. The Permanent Committee

aims at providing a forum for member States from Asia and the Pacific to facilitate cooperation in the development of national and regional spatial data infrastructures, share experiences and good practices, and consult on matters of common interest. The Conference will have the opportunity to review and appreciate, through some presentations, the work performed by this Committee and its Working Groups.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Cartography and geographic information are facing growing challenges: new sensors collecting high resolution data in digital form, GIS evolving into a mainstream IT technology, integrated management of information and the use of Internet and other multimedia to disseminate it, and increased demand on cartographic services and products. We look forward to receiving your expert advice on how to reap the benefits of these new developments, particularly for disaster management, both at the national as well as at the regional level.

I hope this Conference will continue the tradition of shaping a positive vision for the future and proposing avenues that allow Spatial Data Infrastructure for sustainable development to evolve to the next level. I would like to assure you that my staff and I are committed to assist you to make this conference a success. I wish all participants a very productive and successful event.

Thank you.