

# Review: The First High Level Forum on Global Geospatial Information Management (GGIM), a United Nations Initiative

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Location referenced databases are increasingly important to societies all over the world. Geospatial data and associated policies at regional and global levels are important tools for addressing current cross-border problems across a wide range of disciplines and sectors. In response to these challenges, and following several years of preparatory activities on regional and global geospatial information management issues, the United Nations (UN) officially launched Global Geospatial Information Management (GGIM) initiative ([www.ggim.un.org](http://www.ggim.un.org)) with Resolution 2011/24 of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in July 2011. The Resolution created a formal mechanism for discussing key issues and potential action relating to SDI developments at national, regional and global levels, involving UN member states as the key players. The Council also adopted a resolution to form a UN Committee of Experts for Global Geospatial Information Management (UN GGIM). The GGIM initiative aims at playing a leading role in setting the agenda for the development of global geospatial information and to promote its use to address key global challenges. It provides a forum to liaise and coordinate among the UN member states, and between UN member states and international organizations.

As an effort of furthering GGIM initiatives, the First High Level Forum on GGIM, was held in Seoul from 24 to 26 October 2011, which was jointly organized by the United Nations and Korean National Geographic Information Institute (NGII Korea). The forum was supported by the Permanent Committee on GIS Infrastructure for Asia and the Pacific (PCGIAP), the Permanent Committee for Geospatial Data Infrastructure of the Americas (PC-IDEA) and the Committee on Development Information, Science and Technology (CODIST) for Africa. About 350 participants from 90 countries, 22 UN representatives, and 37 representatives from international organizations and the private sector attended the forum. The inaugural session was addressed by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea Mr. Kim Hwang-Sik, United Nations' Under-Secretary-General Mr. Sha Zukang, and Prof. William

Cartwright, President of the Joint Board of Geospatial Information Societies. In the opening address, the Prime Minister stressed that geospatial information is the most fundamental and essential tool to support the joint efforts in resolving global issues. By interconnecting information on natural disasters, poverty and the environment through location data, global issues such as sustainable development and poverty eradication can be systematically and effectively managed. He pointed out that, as a consequence of rapid technological advances, geospatial information have become increasingly important in our daily lives.

The Forum began with a Ministerial Segment followed by the opening session. Ministers from eight countries (Korea, Chile, Finland, India, Malaysia, Mongolia, Namibia, and Niger) participated the session and delivered their statements. Dr. Vanessa V. Lawrence CB, Director General and Chief Executive, of Ordnance Survey, United Kingdom moderated the session. The sessions began with keynote speech followed by panel discussions. The session mainly focused on exchanging views on the role of geospatial-information in national development. The Ministers strongly supported the GGIM initiatives and praised the role of geospatial information in policy formulation and evidence-based decision making for national development. Several policy challenges like climate change, disaster management, population growth and food security, tourism, urban planning and sustainable development were discussed. Ministers pointed out that demand for the geospatial information is not only the concern of political level but also the increasing concern of civil society in the context of efficient public service delivery. Most importantly, the Ministers stressed the importance of working together across borders, through research and development (R&D) activities, sharing good practices and technology transfer, in order to meet national, regional and global demand for geospatial information, such that Member States with less capacity could also be benefited by providing access to additional capabilities and capacities. The delegates appreciated the attention that

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was given at the highest political level regarding the issue of geospatial information management. Such an attention from the political level was considered as an important precondition to successfully tackle the institutional and policy challenges related to geospatial information management.

The Ministerial Segment was followed by four thematic sessions focusing on “Challenges in Geospatial Policy Formulation and Institutional Arrangement”, “Developing Common Frameworks and Methodologies”, “International Coordination and Cooperation in Meeting Global Needs” and “Capacity Building and Knowledge Transfer”. Each session began with Keynote speech followed by panel discussions.

The Forum was preceded on Sunday 23 October by an Exchange Forum attended by representatives from the geospatial industry and the government. The geospatial communities affirmed their commitment, and together with the academia, pledged to use their collective professional expertise, research and development capacities to help realize the vision and goal of UN\_GGIM of building sustainable geospatial information infrastructure at national, regional, and global levels and of enhanced cooperation in the generation, dissemination and sharing of geospatial information.

The other key issues identified and discussed in the forum can be summarized as follows:

- Common frameworks and methodologies are useful to increase accessibility and sharing of data. The concept of global geodetic reference system and a global consultation mechanism on the adoption of technical standards are appreciable. Further exploration is needed for common framework, which is expected through appropriate work groups under UN\_GGIM. Collaboration among the Member States in developing common framework, tools and procedures is important. Adoption of common frameworks and methodologies is also useful to share best practices on impact and usefulness of well implemented national spatial data infrastructures.
- International geospatial information societies and standard setting organizations deserve important role in GGIM initiatives. UN\_GGIM could play an

important role to act as a coordinating body providing overall guidance and direction.

- The geospatial industry can be a key partner of global geospatial information community. The dialogue between the governments and industry partners should be continued under the umbrella of UN\_GGIM.
- The accessibility and sharing of geospatial data at the national level should possible at minimum cost and it should be one of the information policy issues. Open data (and metadata) platforms could be of great support for effective integration of geospatial data with other thematic data. Privacy and national security considerations need to be taken seriously and restrictions on the release of geospatial data should be minimal.
- UN\_GGIM could develop and elaborate some guidelines for countries, describing existing models of institutional arrangements and their strengths and shortcomings.
- There is urgent need of developing a roadmap based on international best practices to assist countries in the development of a National Spatial Data Infrastructure which would form the basis for integrating data with other sources and for data-sharing at all levels (local, national, regional and global).
- Effective strategies for building and strengthening capacity of Member states are needed to manage geospatial information. A holistic capacity building effort is needed that includes capacity assessment and capacity enhancement in all dimensions: building of knowledge and institutions, education research and outreach.
- UN\_GGIM Mechanism can be a coordinating body for facilitating regional cooperation, and exploiting and utilizing the strength of the international professional communities as well as geospatial industry.
- Effective regional cooperation is required with greater efforts for building effective spatial data infrastructure and capacity development in the developing countries.

At the closing ceremony, held on the final day of the event, the Forum adopted the Seoul Declaration.

## **Seoul Declaration on Global Geospatial Information Management (GGIM)**

(Issued on 26 Oct, 2011)

We, the participants of the First High Level Forum on Global Geospatial Information Management held in Seoul, Korea, on October 24 to 26, 2011, having met in the context of United Nations initiatives to enhance global cooperation in the field of geospatial information management in order to help overcome global challenges, hereby issue this Seoul Declaration on Global Geospatial Information Management (GGIM).

*Recalling* Resolution 2011/24 of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, which recognized the need to promote international cooperation in the field of global geospatial information;

*Recalling further* the United Nations Secretary-General's Report E/2011/89, which encouraged the strengthening of cooperation among Member States and International Organizations and emphasized the urgency in establishing concrete actions for the further development of global geospatial information in order to adequately respond to global challenges;

*Recognizing* the need for full interoperability of multi-dimensional geospatial information and integration with other data sources at national, regional, and global level, in order to provide an effective information base for the resolution of global and local issues, and the need for establishing national, regional and global mechanisms for effective management and utilization of such information;

*Sharing* a global vision and conviction that reliable and timely geospatial information is an important basis for policy decision making, especially in the context of humanitarian assistance and sustainable development;

We, therefore resolve,

- to express our support for the initiative of the United Nations to foster geospatial information management among UN Member States, international organizations, and the private sector; and in this regard:
- to take actions to foster and strengthen national, regional and global cooperation with the aim of developing an interconnected global community of practice on geospatial information under the umbrella of the United Nations;
- to devise effective processes for jointly and collaboratively promoting common frameworks and standards, as well as harmonized definitions and methods for the treatment of national geospatial data in order to enhance geospatial information management at the national, regional and global level;
- to share experiences in policy-making, supporting legislation, and funding strategies, to encourage and develop best practices in geospatial information management (i.e. collection, storage, maintenance and dissemination) at all levels, including integration of spatial data with thematic data from other sources, and to facilitate and promote capacity development in the developing countries.

## References:

1. *Seoul Declaration on GGIM*  
(<http://ggim.un.org/docs/meetings/High%20level%20forum/Seoul%20Declaration%20on%20GGIM-25%20Oct.pdf>)
2. *Summary of the UN\_GGIM Meeting*  
(<http://ggim.un.org/docs/meetings/High%20level%20forum/GGIM-chairman%20summary%20HLF-26.pdf>)



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