

Meeting of the Economic and Social Council with the Chairs of the Functional Commissions and Expert Bodies

1 February 2021

10:00 am – 1:00 pm

Virtual meeting on WebEx platform

United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management

Statement by Ms. Ingrid Vanden Berghe, Co-Chair, Belgium

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

It gives me great pleasure to participate in this important dialogue.

Established by the Economic and Social Council in 2011, the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management, or UN-GGIM, is the apex intergovernmental mechanism for making joint decisions and setting directions with regard to the production, availability and use of geospatial information within national, regional and global policy frameworks.

For those not so familiar, ‘geospatial information’ describes the location of ‘where’ all things are, and provides the digital connection between a place, its people and their activities. In this regard, geospatial information reflects the digital version of our physical world, in which all human, economic and environmental activity takes place. Due to the broad and cross-cutting nature of geospatial information, the Committee of Experts coordinates its work closely with two other subsidiary bodies of the Council to ensure coherence and avoid overlaps – the Statistical Commission and the Group of Experts on Geographical Names.

The annual theme of ECOSOC and the HLPF also informs the work of the Committee of Experts. This work is conducted in the context of developing geospatial methods, frameworks, guides and standards to assist Member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, other global development agendas, and national development priorities.

Given the impact and consequences of COVID-19, the Committee welcomes the theme of the 2021 Council and the HLPF. While this theme intersects the pandemic with the social, economic and environmental complexities of sustainable development, and seeks solutions towards greater resilience and faster recovery, within this decade of action, they all happen somewhere.

To assist Member States to better understand what is happening where, since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, specific national to global geospatial frameworks have been developed, adopted and implemented by the Committee of Experts. These include the: **Integrated Geospatial Information Framework; Global Statistical Geospatial Framework; Strategic Framework on Geospatial Information and Services for Disasters; and Framework for Effective Land Administration.**

Distinguished Delegates

In April 2020, the Committee quickly shifted its focus to address the impact of COVID-19 and to find practical solutions to not only operationalize the use of geospatial information in response to the SDGs but also the pandemic. A key action was the convening of a series of regional COVID-19 virtual seminars to explore the influence and impact of the geospatial data ecosystem to the pandemic. The seminars and associated case studies highlighted many common and persistent issues, all of which were elaborated further within a white paper, 'COVID19: Ready to Respond', prepared by the Committee of Experts for its tenth session in August 2020.

The pandemic has reinforced that, as with the SDGs, the most vulnerable countries continue to face the greatest challenges in collecting, analyzing and using high-quality, timely and reliable data, including geospatial data, Earth observations, statistics, and other location-based data. In many countries, while much of the urgently needed data might exist in some form somewhere, it is often not discoverable, structured, interoperable or standardized.

Critical data cannot be readily accessed, shared and, more importantly, integrated with other data for decision-making. However, while it may be seen that there are gaps that exist, we are finding new ways and opportunities for countries to strengthen their geospatial capabilities and achieve a more comprehensive, sustainable and integrated approach through the implementation of the strategic frameworks and methodologies that have been developed by the Committee of Experts.

At its tenth session, convened virtually in August and September 2020, the impact of the pandemic permeated across the Committee's programme of work, and highlighted the need to:

- Continue to work with Member States and related bodies on the response to the pandemic;
- Ensure that experiences gained and lessons learned are shared;
- Deepen the analysis of vulnerability, based on disaggregated demographic and health data;
- Consider strategies and modalities to support Member States in mobilizing financial resources to strengthen national geospatial information management; and
- Ensure that response is coordinated, effective and sustainable, including through the implementation of the strategic geospatial frameworks developed by the Committee;

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate that the mandates of the Committee of Experts are provided by ECOSOC resolutions in 2011 and 2016. As requested by the Council in 2016, the Committee will report back to the Council this year regarding its continued efforts to work with the Statistical Commission and with the entire United Nations system, and to integrate geospatial and statistical information systems and, in this context, to examine the strengthening of the institutional arrangements of the Committee of Experts.

Thank You.