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DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION

**UNRCC-PCGIAP International Symposium on Spatially Enabled Government and Society
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Statement

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Dear Participants and Colleagues,

I am very pleased to be able to join you this morning in this International Symposium on Spatially Enabled Government and Society. I am delighted to see so many professionals gathered here, representing countries from the region as well as international organizations and the geospatial industry. On behalf of the United Nations, I wish to place on record our appreciation to Datuk Prof. Abdul Kadir, Director General of the Department of Surveying and Mapping of Malaysia, and his staff for their hard work in organizing this Symposium. I would also like to thank the Permanent Committee on GIS Infrastructure for Asia and the Pacific and its President, Li Pengde from China, its Vice-President, Hiroshi Murakami from Japan, and its Secretary, Leem, Seong An from Republic of Korea, for their efforts in promoting the work of PCGIAP. In this regard, let me acknowledge the support that the PCGIAP secretariat is providing to the UN in organizing the forthcoming UN Regional Cartographic Conferences for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok in October/November 2012.

The Eighteenth UN Regional Cartographic Conference, held in Bangkok less than three years ago, has dedicated its work to the theme: “Spatial Enablement and the Response to Climate Change and the Millennium Development Goals”, which set the stage for the equally important theme of the current symposium: “Spatially Enabled Government and Society: Towards Spatial Maturity”. The focus at this symposium – as Datuk Kadir has mentioned in his speech – is on the role of geo-spatial infrastructure and the use of spatial data and information in addressing the major challenges of our times. This is an important issue for discussion and the geospatial information professionals have to make the case that their work is just as important as other professional groups. The sub-theme of ‘towards spatial maturity’ has particular relevance.

I believe that this symposium, which brings together specialists from Asia and the Pacific and from other parts of the world, provides an excellent opportunity to address this issue by exchanging experiences and best practices among national, regional and international institutions. This symposium will deal with institutional, legal and common frameworks, management models, and technical standards for the building of sustainable spatial data infrastructures. The ultimate challenge is how we can help countries develop the full potential of geospatial information and the underlying technology in order to make it accessible to, and able to be used effectively by, a broad range of users.

Distinguished Participants,

At the outset of this symposium, allow me to say a few words about inter-governmental consultation on Global Geospatial Information Management (GGIM) and development and how the world could benefit from the newly established GGIM mechanism.

Since 1948, the United Nations has been promoting better understanding of cartography, geographical names and geospatial information among the Member States through international cooperation as well as conferences, publications, training courses and technical projects. In 1948, ECOSOC adopted resolution 131 (VI) on the coordination of cartographic services of specialized agencies and international organizations, in which it recognized the importance of mapping for global activities and the benefits of coordinating cartographic services of the United Nations and its Member States. The interest of Member States in a coordinated programme of international cartography was translated into two resolutions by the Council in the 1950s, which led to the establishment of the regional cartographic conference for Asia and the Pacific. Subsequent resolutions of these conferences reaffirmed the need for regional and global cooperation on geospatial information and led to the establishment of the Permanent Committee on Geographic Information System (GIS) Infrastructure for Asia and the Pacific (PCGIAP) in 1994, and recently in July 2011, to the creation of the intergovernmental mechanism, the UN Committee of Experts on GGIM.

The Regional Cartographic Conferences for Asia and the Pacific constitute an important regional mechanism for the exchange of information among national mapping and surveying authorities and the international scientific organizations active in geospatial information. They offer a forum where governmental officials, planners, scientists and experts from all over the world could address common and critical issues affecting the work of national mapping and surveying organizations in this area.

Since 1955, 18 Regional Cartographic Conferences were convened every three years in the Asia & Pacific region. As I mentioned before, the 19th Conference will take place in ESCAP facilities in Bangkok, Thailand, from 29 October - 2 November 2012 (8 of these conferences took place in Bangkok while the other 10 were hosted by different countries in the region)ⁱ.

The Regional Cartographic Conferences are important part of regional consultation mechanism and they must continue and be further strengthened. In this regard, the same conclusion must be made for PCGIAP.

As many of you may know, PCGIAP, the Permanent Committee on Geographic Information System (GIS) Infrastructure for Asia and the Pacific, was established pursuant to a resolution adopted during the thirteenth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Pacific, held in 1994, in Beijing, China. In that resolution, the Conference recommended "the national survey and mapping organizations in the region form a permanent committee to discuss and agree on, inter-alia, geographical information system standards, geographical information system infrastructure and institutional development, and linkage of the prospective committee with related bodies in the world."

PCGIAP operates under the purview of the United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Pacific (UNRCC-AP) and submits its reports and recommendations to that Conference. It provides substantive and organizational support

to the Conference, in terms of selection of topics to be discussed by the Conference and related invited speakers, as well as other secretariat work. Since its creation, the UN Secretariat has forged strong ties with PCGIAP in the preparation and organization of the UNRCC-AP, and encouraged PCGIAP to cooperate with other regional organizations (e.g. PC-IDEA) and participate in other events (UNRCC-America, etc.). This close collaboration with PCGIAP reflects UN's recognition of the importance of geospatial information at national and regional levels and that regional initiatives are the vital foundation for the global agenda.

Distinguished Participants,

As you are aware, the UN has started an initiative on the Global Geospatial Information Management, in response to the need expressed by many countries for a global coordination that would enable the global community to effectively manage and utilize the great potential of geospatial information and resources. This is similar to what PCGIAP is doing but at the global scale.

In this context, the United Nations, through ECOSOC, has recently established an intergovernmental body, the UN Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management, providing a forum for coordination and dialogue among the Member States, and between Member States and relevant international organizations, including the United Nations Regional Cartographic Conferences and their permanent committees on spatial data infrastructures, and on enhanced cooperation in the field of global geospatial information. I can assure you that at a time when few new intergovernmental bodies are being created, this decision reflected ECOSOC's commitment to the importance of geospatial information globally for sustainable development and humanitarian assistance.

The Committee convened its inaugural session in October, 2011 in Seoul, Republic of Korea, back to back with the First High Level Forum on Global Geospatial Information Management. I am grateful to the Minister for Natural Resources and the

Environment, Malaysia, for taking time to attend the Ministerial Segment of the High Level Forum, along with seven Ministers from other Member States. The Ministers gave a strong endorsement for the importance of advancing a global framework for managing geospatial information and they stressed the importance of spatially enabled government and society and ‘democratization of data’ to enhance development potentials.

The Seoul Declaration adopted at the High Level Forum gave strong political support to the GGIM initiative, as Member States realized that they must come together to address the issues of managing global geospatial information, and not leaving it to multi-national companies such as Google or Bing. The Seoul Declaration urged the need to foster and strengthen national, regional, and global cooperation, so as to develop an inter-connected global community of practice under the United Nations. It also stressed the need to devise effective processes for promoting common frameworks and standards, harmonized definitions and methods for the treatment of national geospatial data. The Declaration further called for the sharing of experiences in policy making, supporting legislation, and funding strategies, and facilitation and promotion of capacity development among the developing countries.

It is clear that the GGIM initiative has now gained traction, and the countries hope that through GGIM, they can come together to build a professionally credible and transparent data platform as well as a regulatory framework to facilitate the effective management of surging geospatial information around the world. In this regard, I believe personally that GGIM should aim for the following four essential tasks:

- a) Evolving a vision for the future in the management of geospatial information nationally, regionally and globally. It should pay special attention to the evolution in technology, in institutional arrangements, and in the role of the government as the regulator within the context of a globally agreed regulatory framework. The GGIM Committee has already embarked on a visioning exercise with respect to the future trends in technology.

- b) Evolving a platform for data sharing and dissemination globally so that the data could be effectively used to address global challenges in a timely manner.
- c) Evolving a globally agreed ‘Statement of Ethics’ and a supporting code of conduct. The geospatial information community should face up to the challenges of providing guidelines on ethical behaviors for the profession. This is especially important as crowd sourcing becomes a source of geospatial information. This statement of ethics should help guide the behavior of all entities engaging in the production, management, and dissemination of geospatial information.
- d) Evolving a mutually beneficial relationship between the public sector and the private sector with clearly defined roles. There is no question that the private sector has a major role to play in the production and dissemination of geospatial information. Yet, they can’t exist in a regulatory vacuum. The government must establish a clear, transparent and professional sound regulatory framework so that both the public and the private sector can mutually reinforce each other in harnessing the power of geospatial information in national development.

Distinguished Participants

In the last decade, new technologies have deeply transformed the availability and accessibility of geospatial information and its potential use, both in daily decisions and use as well as at the policy level. Sound geospatial information is crucial for addressing the complex problems the world is facing today. These problems are global in nature and affect different regions, rural and urban areas alike, requiring coordinated efforts, more innovative and sophisticated approaches, as well as effective tools to ultimately guide our way to sustainable development.

With greater technical capabilities comes greater responsibility to cooperate effectively. At the UN, we recognize this responsibility. I hope the countries around the world, the professional organizations, and the private sector will support the work and vision of GGIM and make its vision come true.

Thank you.

ⁱ **List of UN Regional Cartographic Conferences for Asia and the Far East**

1. Mussoorie, India, 15 - 25 February 1955;
2. Tokyo, Japan, 20 October - 1 November 1958;
3. Bangkok, Thailand, 27 October - 10 November 1961;
4. Manila, The Philippines, 21 November - 5 December 1964;
5. Canberra, Australia, 8 - 22 March 1967;
6. Tehran, Iran, 24 October - 7 November 1970;
7. Tokyo, Japan, 15 -27 October 1973;
8. Bangkok, Thailand, 17 - 28 January 1977;

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9. Wellington, New Zealand, 11 - 22 February 1980;
10. Bangkok, Thailand, 17 - 28 January 1983;
11. Bangkok, Thailand, 5 - 16 January 1987;
12. Bangkok, Thailand, 20 - 28 February 1991;
13. Beijing, China, 9 - 18 May 1994;
14. Bangkok, Thailand, 3 - 7 February 1997;
15. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 11-14 April 2000;
16. Okinawa, Japan, 14-18 July 2003;
17. Bangkok, Thailand, 18-22 September 2006;
18. Bangkok, Thailand, 26-29 October 2009