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Letter dated 15 June 2022 from the Co-Chairs of the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management addressed to the Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council

On behalf of the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management we would once again like to express our gratitude for your participation in our meeting in New York from 26 to 28 April 2022 and the fruitful exchange of ideas we had on that occasion. At the meeting, the Bureau of the Committee and the friends of the Co-Chairs of the Committee held consultations on the draft report prepared pursuant to resolution [2016/27](#) of the Economic and Social Council on strengthening institutional arrangements on geospatial information management, in which the Council requested that the Committee report back to the Council, no later than during its 2022 session, on the implementation of the resolution as well as on its 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.

Following a global consultation and review process involving Member States, the Bureau has now finalized the report of the Committee entitled “Enhancing global geospatial information management”, to be transmitted to the Council for its consideration and adoption before the conclusion of its 2022 session (see annex). As you are aware, the report is a critical part of efforts to provide substantive support to a draft resolution entitled “Enhancing global geospatial information management arrangements”, on which a number of countries, led by Fiji, are currently working.

(Signed) Ingrid **Vanden Berghe** (Belgium)
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Annex to the letter dated 15 June 2022 from the Co-Chairs of the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management addressed to the Vice-President of the Economic and Social Council

Enhancing global geospatial information management

Report of the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management

I. Introduction

1. The present report of the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management has been prepared pursuant to the request made in July 2016 by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution [2016/27](#) on strengthening institutional arrangements on geospatial information management. In the resolution, the Council acknowledged the considerable achievements made by the Committee in its first five years, recognized that it had operated effectively and was well placed to continue to contribute to the work of the United Nations. The Council acknowledged the Committee's contribution to the strengthening of geospatial information management capacities and utilization in developing countries, welcomed the Committee's efforts to streamline the work of the subsidiary bodies of the Council in the field of geospatial information management, and recognized its role in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and other global development agendas within the purview of the United Nations.

2. Geospatial information is a description of the physical location of features around us, including what is on, above and below the surface of the Earth. It also describes the relationships of these geographical features with other features and associated information. In other words, geospatial information consists of data that are referenced to a location or place, such as geographical coordinates, an address, a building or even a vehicle travelling along a road, ships at sea or satellites in orbit. It describes where all things are and establishes a digital connection between people, their place, their activities and their environment. Geospatial information is a digitized version of the physical world, in which all human, economic and environmental activity takes place. Comprising both data and enabling technologies, geospatial information touches many sectors and thematic areas across the entire development paradigm. Geospatial data is a vital component of the overall information and management systems related to the Earth and human activities. They enable us not only to map the current situation on Earth, but also the modelling of nature's processes or spread of disasters. Given its cross-cutting nature, geospatial information is a critical component of national infrastructure and the knowledge economy that provides a blueprint of what happens where in a country, as well as the means to integrate a wide variety of government services that contribute to economic growth, national security, sustainable social development, environmental sustainability, peace and national prosperity. As globalization exceeds countries and continents, it is vital to collaborate throughout the world and manage the global standardization and integration of geospatial information.

3. The urgent need to take concrete action to strengthen international cooperation in the area of global geospatial information management was recognized by the United Nations in July 2011, when the Council adopted resolution [2011/24](#), by which it established the Committee in accordance with the terms of reference contained in

the annex to the resolution, to be established and administered within existing resources and organized accordingly, and requested the Committee to present to the Council in 2016 a comprehensive review of all aspects of its work and operations, in order to allow Member States to assess its effectiveness.

4. In January 2016, pursuant to Council resolution 2011/24, the Committee submitted to the Council, for its consideration, the report entitled “Programme review of the work of the Committee on Global Geospatial Information Management” (see [E/2016/47](#)). In it, the Committee provided a brief account of its establishment, reviewed the considerable achievements and progress made from 2011 to 2015 and presented a set of recommendations for consideration by the Council on its future modalities and programme of work.

5. In July 2016, following the comprehensive programme review of the Committee’s work and operations, the Council adopted resolution [2016/27](#), in which it decided to broaden and strengthen the mandate of the Committee as the relevant body on geospatial information consisting of government experts and invited the Committee to report on all matters relating to geography, geospatial information and related topics. The Council also stressed the need to strengthen the coordination and coherence of global geospatial information management, in capacity-building, norm-setting, data collection, data dissemination and data sharing, among other things, and acknowledged the importance of strengthening capacity-building in the area of geospatial information management and relevant statistical integration, especially in developing countries.

6. With resolution [2016/27](#), the Council firmly anchored the Committee as a subsidiary body. It noted that sustainable funding and support, particularly for the operations of the Committee focused on the Sustainable Development Goals, was needed to strengthen and ensure the continued effectiveness of the Committee. The Council also addressed the streamlining of the subsidiary bodies of the Council in the field of geospatial information management and strengthening the Committee’s mandate, among other things. However, despite its enhanced mandate and the requirement that the Committee contribute more to the work of the United Nations, no resources were provided. Noting the increasing role and relevance of the Committee, the Council requested, as a compromise, that the Committee report back to the Council, no later than in five years’ time, on the implementation of the resolution as well as on 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 that context, to examine the strengthening of the institutional arrangements of the Committee.

7. Now, after more than a decade of existence, anchored by 11 annual intergovernmental sessions with a fully functioning global architecture, it is incumbent upon the Committee to report back once again to the Council. The present report, prepared by the Bureau and the friends of the Co-Chairs of the Committee, contains details of the continued efforts by the Committee to strengthen the coordination and coherence of global geospatial information management so that the strategic and practical actions of the Committee contribute consistently to the needs of Member States, the Council and the broader United Nations system. It is recognized that much more needs to be done, especially with regard to support for countries in implementing the Committee’s technical recommendations to strengthen their geospatial information management capacities and capabilities. That matter is examined further in the present report, as is the primary topic of strengthening the Committee’s institutional arrangements, and, by extension, ensuring the Committee’s sustainable operation in the future.

8. The report describes the process of transition marking the Committee's work and its evolving maturity over the first decade of its existence, and demonstrates the clear value proposition the Committee offers to the United Nations and to Member States as a means to strengthen multidisciplinary and multisectoral participation and reinforce the commitment to achieving an inclusive and integrated approach to global geospatial information management.

9. One of the key points highlighted in the report is that the Committee's current institutional arrangements are not sustainable; they are limiting further progress and lessening the Committee's overall impact. The Committee has operated relatively effectively owing to the considerable contributions and goodwill of national geospatial experts in Member States. However, that goodwill is a finite resource. In these times of constrained budgets and limited human resources it is neither sustainable nor sufficient to realize the potential impact of the Committee's work in supporting the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and other development agendas. Furthermore, those contributions and goodwill require additional secretariat resources to ensure coordination and coherence across the Committee's growing programme of work.

10. The case for change is made, challenges that the Committee faces in addressing gaps are identified, as are the needs that the Committee has not yet been able to address regarding the implementation of the present resolution. At the national level, particular attention is paid to the need to develop and foster greater capacity for institutional collaboration, interoperability and integration across the various national government data information systems, platforms and policy processes. Various institutional arrangements are considered for strengthening the Committee.

11. Finally, a set of recommendations is made for consideration by the Council on the future modalities and programme of work of the Committee. As stated above, the report has been prepared pursuant to resolution [2016/27](#) and is built on reports and decisions issued following that resolution under the agenda item entitled "Strengthening geospatial information management" during each session of the Committee held between 2017 and 2021, as well as on the numerous technical reports prepared and milestones achieved since 2016.

12. The Committee is seeking the Council's endorsement for the strengthening of its institutional arrangements and the enhancement of global geospatial information management so that it may continue its growing programme of work, coordination, coherence and value proposition at the global and regional level through the Council and the Committee's regional committees, at the national level through Governments, and across the United Nations system through the subsidiary machinery of the Council.

II. Committee of Experts in transition

13. In its first decade, the Committee transitioned through two distinct five-year operational phases, from its establishment and initial organization to its normalized institutional operation. The Committee's architecture, policies, procedures and practices are in place, providing a solid foundation as the Committee now enters its third and most critical transitional phase towards the implementation, operationalization and scaling of geospatial mandates and of building the capacity and capabilities of Member States. Each of those transitions have evolved and strengthened the Committee and its programme of work, as well as the understanding of global geospatial information by Member States. However, the most notable and far-reaching change in the past five years and for the future has been the transition from a quasi-national expert-driven Committee to a unified, whole-of-government-

driven Committee. The profile, leadership and institutional investment of many of the participants from Member States and their national geospatial agencies has commensurately evolved, increased and strengthened.

A. First five-year period (2012–2016): establishment

14. During its first five years, the Committee established its identity, operational modalities, initial programme of work, annual intergovernmental sessions, global expert and working groups, global architecture comprising its five regional committees and thematic networks (see fig. 1), high-level forums, extrabudgetary trust funds and dozens of capacity development workshops and events dedicated to the exchange of knowledge. All of those are firmly anchored in the annual intergovernmental sessions of the Committee.

Figure 1
Global architecture of the Committee (2011–2017)



Abbreviation: UN-GGIM, Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management.

15. With very limited resources but, importantly, with the strong engagement and commitment of national Governments and the international geospatial community, the Committee established and organized itself quickly and delivered concrete results to fulfil its mandate. In doing so, the Committee gained universal recognition as the global mechanism for setting the agenda and deliberating on major issues in geospatial information management. Member State participation in every annual Committee session since 2011 increased, and the momentum generated by the

establishment of the five regional committees underscored the importance that Member States accorded to unifying the global geospatial information community.

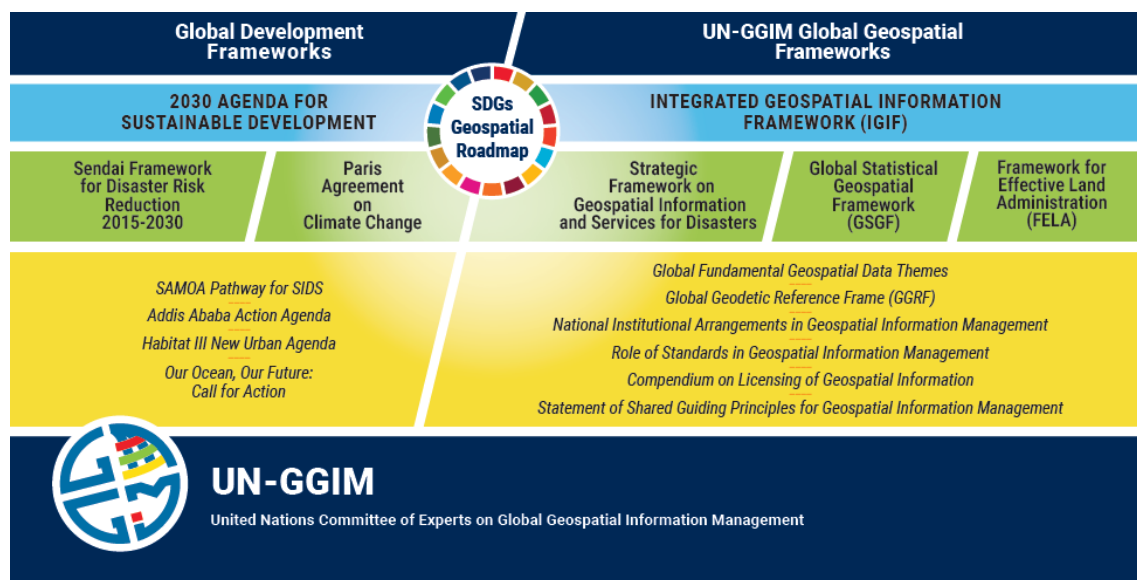
16. Global milestones in those formative years were the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 69/266 and the anchoring of geospatial information in the 2030 Agenda, which contains a clear acknowledgement that the Sustainable Development Goals are highly dependent on high-quality, reliable, interoperable and accessible geospatial data to monitor, measure and report on achievements. The Committee held regular high-level, multi-stakeholder discussions on global geospatial information, promoting a comprehensive dialogue with all relevant actors and bodies by convening four high-level forums on global geospatial information management, hosted by the Republic of Korea (2011), Qatar (2013), China (2014) and by Ethiopia jointly with the Economic Commission for Africa (2016).

17. The Committee established guidance in the area of geospatial information management, by developing, holding consultations on and publishing the first edition of the document entitled “Future Trends in Geospatial Information Management: the five to ten year vision”. The Committee also developed, held global consultations on and adopted a document entitled “Statement of shared guiding principles for geospatial information management”, as well as a document entitled “A guide to the role of standards in geospatial information management”. During that period, the Committee solidified its initial programme of work, as well as its efforts in the areas of norm-setting, knowledge exchange and capacity development with the establishment of the following bodies: Expert Group on the Integration of Statistical and Geospatial Information, expert group on land administration and management, working group on the global geodetic reference frame for sustainable development, working group on geospatial information and services for disasters, working group on development of a statement of shared principles for the management of geospatial information, working group on trends in national institutional arrangements in geospatial information management, and Working Group on Global Fundamental Geospatial Data Themes.

B. Second five-year period (2017–2021): institutionalization

18. During its second five-year period, the Committee became more firmly established with additional mechanisms specifically intended to support Member States. Those included the development of consensus-based global geospatial strategic frameworks, guides, methods, standards and norms to support implementation of the 2030 Agenda and other global and national development agendas. Those efforts were led by the Committee’s umbrella strategic framework, the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework developed by 133 Member States around the world prior to global consultation and adoption by the Committee. Related frameworks and guides adopted with global support included the Strategic Framework on Geospatial Information and Services for Disasters, the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework, the Framework for Effective Land Administration, the global fundamental geospatial data themes, the compendium on the licensing of geospatial information, and the SDGs Geospatial Roadmap (see fig. 2).

Figure 2
Global geospatial frameworks developed by the Committee to support the implementation of global development frameworks



Abbreviations: Habitat III, United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development; SAMOA Pathway, SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action Pathway; SIDS, small island developing States; UN-GGIM, Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management.

19. Also during the second five-year period, the Committee's programme of work was strengthened through better coordination and coherence thanks to the establishment of the working group on marine geospatial information and the working group on policy and legal frameworks for geospatial information management, the transformation of the working group on the global geodetic reference frame for sustainable development into the Subcommittee on Geodesy, and the facilitation, together with the Statistical Commission, of the establishment of the working group on geospatial information of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators. The Committee further strengthened participation and stakeholder involvement in the establishment of the United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management Academic Network, the United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management Private Sector Network and the United Nations Geospatial Network, solidifying the global architecture of the Committee that was created during the first five-year period.

20. Over the past five years, the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework has enabled many Member States to conduct the processes necessary to promote the efficient and effective use and sharing of geospatial information through various levels of government and society for decision-making and innovation, including by helping with the implementation of spatial data infrastructures. Bearing in mind the increased significance of the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework as the overarching paradigm for the further strengthening of nationally integrated geospatial information management, as well as the continuously evolving nature of the Framework, the Committee established the High-level Group of the Framework to provide strategic leadership, coordination and coherence to sustain the momentum and success of the Framework in strengthening national leadership and capacity in integrated geospatial information management nationally.

21. At its eleventh session, the Committee reiterated its support and appreciation for efforts by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to establish the United Nations Global Geospatial Knowledge and Innovation Centre in Deqing, China, and a global geodetic centre of excellence at the United Nations campus in Bonn, Germany. Both of these centres that are now being established will, in an open and transparent manner, provide opportunities to develop and expand global geospatial capacity, competence and capability, and to strengthen geospatial information management arrangements at the national level, especially developing countries. The United Nations Global Geospatial Knowledge and Innovation Centre will contribute to the implementation of the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework as determined by Member States, to develop capacity, promote and support the required innovation, leadership, coordination and standards to develop, strengthen, integrate and deliver national geospatial information policy, data, systems, tools, services and capabilities into the development policies, strategies and arrangements of national Governments. The global geodetic centre of excellence will specifically implement General Assembly resolution 69/266 and assist in sustaining the global geodetic reference frame as the authoritative, reliable, highly accurate global geospatial referencing infrastructure.

22. The momentum and achievements of the Committee have been supported by goodwill contributions and virtual secondments of staff resources by expert representatives of Member States, and through extrabudgetary resources that included a trust fund of China, the eleventh tranche of the United Nations Development Account and the Peace and Development Fund. These resources enabled the Committee to deliver on its mandate and programme of work. In its decision 11/101 of August 2021,¹ the Committee expressed its appreciation for the tangible contributions received through the secondment of virtual staff to support the Committee's work programme. At the same time, Member States were encouraged to consider practical means not only to sustain the current working modalities of the Committee's work, but to strategically strengthen its operations and stable resourcing for the future.

C. Next five-year period (2022–2026): implementation

23. Geospatial information now underpins everything we do, and its full integration with other data of relevance to our lives is key to providing better information and a shared understanding, which in turn enables us to better achieve local, national and global goals, including the 2030 Agenda, recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the climate agenda. While the global development agendas (including drivers, challenges and developments) depend on the application of timely and reliable geospatial information and enabling technologies, the digital divide hinders access to those key capabilities, as the Committee has identified and documented. Thus, real-life implementation in a large number of countries is complex and remains an aspiration.

24. The socioeconomic aspirations of many countries converge around a more sustainable and resilient future in which economic prosperity will benefit the whole of society and support the health and well-being of communities and individuals equitably. Being successful in the pursuit of those goals means overcoming many hurdles related to data availability and data integration. From this point onwards, the Committee will be focused on a key element necessary for the many local to global challenges the world faces: implementation. The Integrated Geospatial Information

¹ See [E/2022/46-E/C.20/2021/16](#).

Framework² and its implementation guide, which provides a tried and tested basic framework led by Member States, anchors the Committee's programme of work. Similar to the 2030 Agenda, the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework is comprehensive and overarching and captures the globally adopted strategic frameworks, guides, methods and standards developed by the Committee over the past decade, in several cases in coordination and partnership with two other subsidiary bodies of the Council: the Statistical Commission and the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names. The Committee is overseeing the delivery of a number of key work programmes that will aid in the implementation and use of geospatial information by all Member States and will help to bridge the digital divide and ensure that no one is left behind.

25. The Integrated Geospatial Information Framework is a multi-dimensional framework aimed at strengthening national geospatial information management at the national level, in particular in developing countries. It comprises an overarching strategy from local to global implementation guidance and action plans at the country level. As it is being implemented by many Member States, the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework is providing the pathway to addressing national development priorities, implementing the 2030 Agenda, responding to and recovering from the pandemic, and other complex issues such as climate change and disaster resilience.

26. To contribute to the growing demand for geospatial knowledge, innovation and capacity development, the Committee is providing strategic oversight for the establishment and operations of the United Nations Global Geospatial Knowledge and Innovation Centre in Deqing, China, and the global geodetic centre of excellence in Bonn, Germany. The Committee is supporting multi-stakeholder partnerships, including the SDG Data Alliance,³ for the implementation of the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework at the country level. The SDG Data Alliance, a multi-stakeholder partnership involving philanthropic foundations, donor technological organizations and the Committee secretariat, enables partnering countries to acquire resources and support, including geospatial methodologies, processes, technologies and tools, to modernize national geospatial capabilities and thus to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and support the follow-up to and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda with Goals-relevant geospatial information that connects people to their location, activities, and environment.

27. It is clear, however, that more resources and enhanced institutional arrangements need to be committed to sustaining and strengthening the implementation mechanisms of the Committee so as to maintain the momentum and ensure impact, including through the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework as the overarching framework for strengthening geospatial information management in accordance with national circumstances. Dedicated capacity and capability development and technical advisory and support initiatives for developing countries, in particular the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, is a critical implementation need for Member States.

III. Value proposition

28. As is only now fully understood by Member States, the Sustainable Development Goals are highly dependent on geospatial information and enabling technologies, which link people to their location and measure where progress is or is not being made, in particular at the local level. Through the breadth of and multiple

² See <https://ggim.un.org/IGIF/>.

³ See <https://alliance.sdg.org/>.

scales used for geography and geospatial information, thinking globally while acting locally makes it possible to address the many development challenges and to bridge the geospatial digital divide. The ongoing global pandemic has demonstrated this quite starkly, reinforcing the realization that, as with efforts to achieve the Goals themselves, the most vulnerable countries continue to face the greatest challenges in collecting, analysing, maintaining and using timely and reliable data, including geospatial and other location-based data. For those reasons, the need to significantly increase the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by geographic location and several other metrics, and to exploit geospatial information and a wide range of other data is enshrined in the 2030 Agenda and other global development agendas.

29. However, geospatial information applies not only to development agendas. It applies to many thematic areas and disciplines, be it climate adaptation, efficient energy sources, secure land and property rights, the blue economy, resilient supply chains, sustainable health, food security, human rights and technology development, to name just a few. All those crucial areas have one crucial aspect in common: location. Everything happens somewhere, and location now underpins everything we do, every minute of every day. By integrating geospatial information and location data with information on societal changes and changes in the landscape we can inform insights today and into the future by establishing a sound basis for understanding what is happening when, where, why and how that affects specific communities. Thus, knowing location – what is happening where – is knowing who is to take what action when and how. The integration of location-based information with other data of relevance to people’s lives and livelihoods is crucial to providing better and useful information for better insights leading to shared understanding, which in turn will enable us to better achieve local, national and international goals and informed decision-making for the benefit of all.

A. What is the value proposition?

30. In 2011, the Committee was just a concept yet to be established and proved. Today, more than a decade later, the undeniable fact is that the Committee is indispensable. Because of the Committee of Experts, the global geospatial community has grown significantly, as has its understanding and awareness. This reflects the considerable efforts and ownership that Member States, at the expert and technical level, have invested in the ongoing programme of work and activities of the Committee. Why have they done so? Because they have recognized the importance, benefits and value of collective work and joint decisions, and because they have seen that the Committee is a very effective and efficient forum for coordination and dialogue among all Member States, as well as between Member States and international organizations. For many developing countries this is critical. The Committee has created the global intersection for harnessing and nurturing geospatial governance and enabling technology, innovation, people and processes. For many countries, the Committee has also established a coherent “geospatial voice” from the national to the global level.

31. Nonetheless, geospatial information, which underpins all industries and all sectors in its universality and applicability, has an inherent problem with regard to communication and awareness. In many respects it is similar to water and electricity: it is taken for granted and is simply expected to be there – until it is not. That is especially the case for developing countries and the least developed countries. Furthermore, it is a common reality that policy developers, decision makers and even the general public understand neither the details of the problems being addressed nor the immense value of geospatial capabilities in solving everyday societal, economic

and environmental problems from the very local to the global level. This is largely due to the foundational nature of geospatial information, which often means that its direct impacts are hidden from the end users of the applications and solutions that use it. The hidden role of geospatial information results in a continued lack of awareness of its power and of the critical value of combining and integrating location-based data with many other data types, such as statistical data.

32. Yet this is changing. Geospatial information can bridge the digital data gap across many communities and sectors. There are new opportunities for Member States to acquire and manage data and to strengthen their geospatial capabilities – to achieve a more comprehensive and integrated data approach – through the implementation of the frameworks and methods that have been developed by the Committee. This provides the enduring and much-needed value proposition for the Member States.

B. Time to invest in the Committee of Experts

33. After more than a decade, it is time to invest in the Committee to strengthen national geospatial information arrangements and enhance global geospatial information management. While, in the past, a “pat on the back” used to provide a good feeling, it is not a sustainable way for the Committee to continue its operations. The Bureau and the friends of the Co-Chairs of the Committee, at their meeting held from 26 to 28 April 2022 at United Nations Headquarters in New York, agreed that the Committee required the following: (a) structure, as an expert subsidiary body of the Council with inclusive and participatory modalities (including regional committees and thematic networks) for making joint decisions and setting directions by consensus with all Member States; (b) sustainability, with regular budgetary resources to ensure continual coordination and coherence, including in norm-setting and capacity development; and (c) status, with meeting entitlements accorded to convene annual sessions, taking into consideration entitlements available from the cessation of the mandates of the United Nations Regional Cartographic Conferences for Asia and the Pacific and for the Americas in 2016 that have not been transferred.

34. The Committee combines the experiences of the global geospatial community by uniting the knowledge and experiences of national expert representatives, Governments, the United Nations system, civil society organizations, industry and the private sector, and the academic world collectively, focusing on the integrated key element of location, and providing an authoritative and enduringly solid basis for informed decisions for the betterment of the environmental, economic and social domains.

35. In spite of its limited resources, in the preceding five years, the Committee has delivered significant value under the mandates provided to it by the Council and in line with the expectations of Member States. That includes the following: facilitating relationships; developing guidance and policy; enabling peer-to-peer dialogue and learning together; building knowledge; effective implementation; and developing capacity and capability.

36. The geospatial data needs were specifically reflected in the video message delivered by the Secretary-General at the first United Nations World Geospatial Information Congress in Deqing, China, in November 2018: “Your dedication, expertise and guidance – in geospatial data, methods, frameworks, tools, and platforms – is urgently needed. The data needs for the Sustainable Development Goals are great, and time is not on our side. Reliable, timely, accessible and disaggregated geospatial information must be brought to bear to measure progress, inform decision-making and ensure effective and inclusive national and subnational programmes that will chart the path towards the geospatial way to a better world, to assist in the

implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, and transform our world for the better”.

37. To date, the Committee has completely relied on extrabudgetary funding. The Committee secretariat has made commendable efforts to secure extrabudgetary funding and has succeeded in significantly expanding its technical assistance activities around the world. However, the shift towards a high dependence on extrabudgetary funding has also had negative consequences: the constant necessity to spend considerable time on identifying sources of funding, uncertainty over the sustainability of various projects, competition within the Statistics Division and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs over resources, and concerns that much of the work that is carried out will remain tied to the interests of donors, all of which leads to a tenuous existence. It is unlikely that these financial constraints will ease anytime soon. Nor will the amount of valuable work reduce, especially as the secretariat is constantly being asked by Member States to take on even more tasks.

38. The Committee is playing a crucial role in setting the agenda for the development of geospatial information globally and the promotion of its use to address key global challenges. There are many ways of fulfilling that role, and the needs are increasing and are spread across a huge variety of fields, following the significant technological developments and the evolving maturity among users and providers. The use of technology and analytical methods has the potential to reduce the geospatial digital divide over the coming decade. Through its strength as a leading global actor, the Committee can, by focusing its efforts, continue to ensure that development takes place where it is most needed within an area that will only continue to grow. Taking this into consideration, it is clear that the global management of the field of geospatial information needs to keep pace, be maintained and grow to be able to deliver according to the development of this exciting future and the amazing field of geospatial information.

39. Member States are now ready to provide even stronger strategic leadership and support to strengthen the organization of the Committee and make future progress possible. However, to meet the needs of the future, Member States need the Committee’s institutional arrangements to be strengthened, addressing the three pillars; structure, sustainability and status.

IV. The case for change

40. Notwithstanding the Committee’s considerable progress and achievements, much urgent work remains for the Committee to enhance understanding of the critical role and value of geospatial information in addressing local, regional and global issues and challenges. This applies to technical and institutional matters, particularly in developing countries, and to policy matters with regard to influencing decision makers and embedding geospatial information into national policy across the globe. It must be noted that the Committee is still very young and has taken on the task of addressing issues and challenges that have, in some cases, been in existence for many years and even decades. Those issues and challenges, combined with the increasing global development challenges, which have their impact at the local level, and the fact that geospatial information can, thanks to its nature, use and applicability, assist every Member State in taking on those urgent challenges, emphasize the increasing role of, need for and relevance of an effective and efficient Committee. For an effective and efficient Committee to be realized, the time to change and strengthen the Committee’s institutional arrangements and enhance global geospatial information management is now.

41. In its resolution 2016/27, the Council decided that the Committee was to continue to operate and implement its mandate in a cost-neutral manner, with any additional costs to the Committee being offset by the cessation of the mandates of the United Nations Regional Cartographic Conferences for Asia and the Pacific and for the Americas. In that regard, the Council decided that the formal United Nations Regional Cartographic Conferences were no longer a necessary requirement and, in order to streamline and avoid duplication, that the meetings of the United Nations Regional Cartographic Conferences for Asia and the Pacific and for the Americas were to cease forthwith, with their substantive mandates and obligations to be assumed by the Committee. However, the entitlements available from the cessation of the Regional Cartographic Conferences have not been transferred to the Committee.

42. Prior to the adoption of resolution 2016/27, in an oral statement on the financial implications, the Programme Planning and Budgeting Division noted that, according to the draft resolution, the Council would decide to broaden and strengthen the mandate of the Committee in a cost-neutral manner, that the Committee had no meeting entitlements, but that it was able to meet annually and could hold its annual session in New York only during the low-activity periods (either in early January or in August), with interpretation services on an as-available basis. That did not include formal editing and translation, into the six official languages of the United Nations on the technical reports on the annual sessions of the Committee.

43. The strengthened mandates provided to the Committee by the Council in 2016 have proved to be compelling but have not been backed by additional resources to implement the mandates, as was the case in 2011. Now, after more than a decade of existence, anchored by 11 annual intergovernmental sessions and with a rapidly growing programme of work and a significant and enduring engagement by Member States, the Committee is well recognized by the global geospatial information community as a very effective, productive and successful intergovernmental mechanism of the United Nations. That recognition also extends into key geospatial areas of academia, industry, the private sector and international geospatial societies. This reflects the considerable efforts by and ownership of Member States at the expert and technical levels.

44. At present, the Committee operates with a limited structure and is underresourced. Yet, it comprises an active and global community that is dedicated to helping each other as Member States, at whatever location. With strengthened institutional arrangements, the Committee can maintain a much-needed and mandated programme of work with a dedicated secretariat to enable connection, coordination, coherence and growth for the global geospatial community. Moreover, the Committee can assist the Council and Member States with expertise, projects and the implementation of proven geospatial frameworks, guides, geodetic systems and technological solutions. Thus, the Committee can invest in innovation and support experts and projects at the global level to close the growing geospatial digital divide between Member States. Geospatial information fills the blank spots on the map, both literally and figuratively. By increasing the Committee's range of actions, it can truly connect the world.

45. Therefore, attention should be given to addressing the gaps and the needs that the Committee has not yet been able to address, such as enhancing geospatial-statistical integration, building capacity in key areas of work, developing implementation capacity and capability, addressing fundamental data needs, enhancing integration across the United Nations system, including the integration of the statistical and geographical names communities, using emerging technologies, closing the geospatial digital divide and enhancing Member State engagement. All those things are framed by the urgent needs related to the achievement of the

Sustainable Development Goals and the decade of action to deliver the Goals, the response to the pandemic and the declaration on the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations.

V. Proposed institutional arrangements

46. The Committee has stressed that its existing structure, together with sustainable funding for its operations, is needed to ensure its continued effectiveness, including meeting entitlements and support, substantive and technical secretariat support, and in particular the funding of the participation of national delegates of developing countries, in order to ensure a broad and balanced representation at the sessions of the Committee. In that context it has 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 has also noted that some of the funding may need to be secured through the consolidation of activities and the rationalization of the various geospatial bodies within the United Nations system.

47. The Committee is a subsidiary body comprising experts from all Member States with specific knowledge in the areas of geospatial information, geography, geodesy, land administration, cartography and mapping, remote sensing, hydrography, land/sea and geographic information sciences, environmental protection and statistics, as well as experts from international organizations participating as observers, to make joint decisions, set directions and implement its mandates, supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda with integrated geospatial information. The Committee will continue to actively support the Council's mandates and activities as a responsible and engaged subsidiary body.

48. The participation of Member States, in particular of developing countries, is indispensable for the continued success of the Committee. Stable and secure resources are required to support the participation of national delegates of developing countries to ensure a broad and balanced representation. Equally indispensable are meeting entitlements for the annual sessions of the Committee. With stable and secure resources and further commitments from Member States, the Committee, which has noted and considered the different starting points of developing countries in their geospatial evolution, will be more effective and efficient in its support and guidance and in meeting its normative, implementation and institutional work.

49. The Committee has agreed to enhance global geospatial information management to respond to the urgent needs regarding the 2030 Agenda and the decade of action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, climate change and the recovery from the pandemic by the following means: increasing capacity-building in the key areas of its work, such as fundamental data needs, through a wider pool of available resources; investing in knowledge-sharing, development of enabling global frameworks and guides, and in innovation and emerging geospatial technologies; integrating more across the United Nations system as a strengthened resource; strengthening responsibilities and the interaction with the Statistical Commission and other subsidiary bodies of the Council; closing the geospatial digital divide; greater Member State engagement through more efficient management and dedicated responsibilities; and supporting experts from developing countries, to leave no one behind.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

50. Considerable achievements and progress have been made by the Committee in the area of global geospatial information management, in line with the mandates given by the Council over the past 11 years, despite limited resources. The Committee's contributions to the strengthening of geospatial information management capacities and utilization in developing countries have to be recognized. While extrabudgetary funding and voluntary contributions by Member States provide valuable short-term programme options, ongoing sustainable funding and support, particularly for the Committee's operations focused on the Sustainable Development Goals and the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework, is needed to strengthen and ensure its continued effectiveness and benefit to Member States.

51. As the global role and relevance of the Committee continue to grow and expand, implementing and sustaining the mandate of the Committee in a cost-neutral manner limits the potential of the Committee to realize the full value of its normative and implementation work. The time has come to enhance the institutional arrangements of the Committee as a subsidiary body of the Council responsible for all matters related to geospatial information, geography, land administration and related topics.

52. The inclusion of the annual session of the Committee in the calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations under the Economic and Social Council must be accompanied by full meeting entitlements, with the immediate transfer of the entitlements available from the cessation of the United Nations Regional Cartographic Conferences for Asia and the Pacific and for the Americas.

53. It must be acknowledged that the adoption of geospatial information with its enabling technologies and innovations remains unequal and the "where" element critically underserved where it is needed most. By geospatially integrating data we can have data that underpin everything we do while helping others, including the Council and Member States, to realize the true potential of their data. The Council has a responsibility to foster the development and strengthening of integrated, robust, reliable, high-quality, timely and disaggregated data systems that harness the power of location-based information so as to ensure evidence-based and data-driven policy development and decision-making.

54. With limited resources, the Committee has delivered significant value since its establishment and remains committed to enhancing global geospatial information management, to responding more efficiently and effectively to the urgent needs regarding the 2030 Agenda and the decade of action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals, the Sendai Framework, climate change and recovery from the pandemic. However, this ongoing commitment brings with it new requirements. The Committee requires the following: (a) structure, as an expert subsidiary body of the Council with inclusive and participatory modalities for making joint decisions and setting directions by consensus with all Member States; (b) sustainability, with regular budgetary resources so as to ensure continual coordination and coherence, including in norm-setting and capacity development; and (c) status, with accorded meeting entitlements to convene annual sessions. As a strengthened subsidiary body of the Council, the Committee will be well placed to support the critical development work of the Council and Member States, and to ensure that no one is geospatially left behind.