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PRESS RELEASE

Cape Town Ministerial Declaration calls for strengthening and integrating Earth observation and prediction systems

Cape Town, 30 November 2007 – Ministers and government officials attending today’s Ministerial Summit on the Group on Earth Observations (GEO) are adopting a Declaration today stressing the importance of interconnecting the world’s diverse environmental monitoring systems over the coming decade.

The construction of a Global Earth Observation System of Systems, or GEOSS, promises to revolutionize the way comprehensive, near-real-time environmental data can be used to make more informed decisions about natural resources, disasters, health threats, energy sources, forestry and many other socially and economically vital issues.

“As we move forward, we need to sustain and build on the gains made by GEO so far,” said Mosibudi Mangena, South African Minister of Science and Technology.

“It will be important for all of us, as members of the Group, to continue working together to ensure that all those who need Earth observation data are able to access it. Developed nations will have to play a prominent leadership role, particularly as regards capacity building and providing much needed financial and technical support to developing countries,” he said.

The Declaration recognizes “that sound policymaking for addressing the environment and sustainable development must be based on understanding, describing, and predicting a complex and interdependent world, and therefore requires terrestrial, oceanic, air-borne, and space-based Earth observations, data assimilation techniques and Earth system modelling.”

It also recognizes the contribution GEOSS can make in collaboration with the UN Conventions on climate change, biological diversity and desertification, and it highlights a range of other critical issues and principles.

“All countries will benefit from the Global Earth Observation System of Systems,” said Jose Achache, Director of the GEO Secretariat. “But perhaps the greatest rewards will be reaped by developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to natural disasters, disease outbreaks and other barriers to sustainable development.”

In addition to issuing the Declaration, the Summit considered a Report on Progress highlighting some 100 Early Achievements illustrating the kinds of societal benefits that the System of Systems will produce.

During the two-day GEO plenary that preceded the Summit, the China-Brazil Earth Resources Satellite (CBERS) Program announced the launch of a new service that will provide Earth observation information to African countries free of charge.

Ministers, delegates and the general public also had the opportunity to visit a major Exhibition on Earth observations featuring some 60 exhibits on all aspects of Earth observing systems, information products and decision-support tools.

Note to journalists: For more information, please see www.earthobservations.org and www.dst.gov.za, or contact Nhlanhla Nyide, Department of Science & Technology, South Africa, at +27 (0)82 871 67 67 or email: nhlanhla.nyide@dst.gov.za, or Michael Williams, GEO Secretariat, Geneva, at +41 22 730 8293 or mwilliams@geosec.org.