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# **CARTOGRAPHY AND GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SCIENCE**

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**Report of the Fifth Plenary Meeting on  
United Nations Geographic Information Working Group**

WHO, Geneva, Switzerland, 12–14 October 2004



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## ***Preface***

Following the establishment of the United Nations Geographic Information Working Group (UNGIWG) and its first four plenary meetings in New York (March 2000), Rome (March 2001), Washington, DC (June 2002) and Nairobi (October 2003), the Fifth UNGIWG Plenary Meeting was held in Geneva, Switzerland, from 12 to 14 October 2004 and was hosted by the World Health Organization (WHO). Fifty-five experts from the UN organizations, as well as some local experts and geo-spatial industry observers, participated in this meeting. Topics covered included the progress of work of the Working Group as well as the review, re-organization and process of UNGIWG, including the Task Groups.

This report summarizes the discussions and outcomes of the three-day meeting. All efforts were made to summarize as closely as possible the discussions and arguments, as well as the conclusions reached during the meeting.

The UNGIWG Secretariat wishes to express its gratitude to the staff of the WHO, Communicable Diseases (CDS) and Evidence and Information for Policy (EIP) clusters for their professional arrangements, hospitality and the support extended to all the participants during this very fruitful meeting.

UNGIWG was initially endorsed by the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ) of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC).

After the restructuring of the ACC into the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), UNGIWG now operates as an ad-hoc interagency coordination group under the framework of the High Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) of the CEB.

## ***Executive summary***

The Fifth Plenary Meeting of the United Nations Geographic Information Working Group (UNGIWG) took place at the WHO Headquarters in Geneva from 12 to 14 October 2004.

One of the purposes of the meeting was to review the progress of work of the different Task Groups and define their plans of action for the coming year. Several of the Task Group(s) achieved their tasks and discussion took place regarding the re-direction of activities for the coming years in order to produce new outputs relevant to UN priorities.

Several new recommendations emerged from the Fifth UNGIWG Plenary Meeting. These included:

- the use of the page-size global level template;
- the pursuit of NGA (NIMA) for obtaining the Vmap1 layer;
- the use of the Imagery System Contract throughout UN agencies for future purchases, using the multi-agency license option;
- populating the Very High Resolution (VHR) imagery service with records;
- the use of the draft ISO template for the UN spatial metadata version 1.0;
- the endorsement of a core sub set of the norms listed in the UNGIWG Map production guidelines.

The participants also requested that the new Chair(s) take precise action in the year to come in order to support the work of the different Task Groups. This includes:

- in order to speed up the process-sending a letter to the CEB requesting their advice regarding the representation of disputed areas;
- having the institutions that need to respond to a particular request to look first at the SALB web site to see if the information requested is available and also to provide feedback if information or data is found that could complete Second Administrative Level Boundaries (SALB);
- having the UN agencies interested in the SALB data (especially in the Geneva area) to support with resources for the centre or contribute to a network of expertise to accelerate the process;
- considering the creation of a central imagery download service for the UN community, building on the existing metadata service hosted by UNOSAT (includes Landsat and other medium resolution data);
- improving knowledge and information sharing on the latest dataset updates;
- pursuing the expansion of the Charter use for the UN community;
- begin to look at the issues of copyright and intellectual property;
- adopting a process for the recognition, publication and application of the recommendations of the annual plenary meetings;
- making the documents produced by UNGIWG more visible and accessible to the UN community.

It is also important to underline the creation of a new Task Group which will be looking at the use of the GPS devices within the UN system in order to propose recommendations to UNGIWG.

On the administrative level, the participants strengthened the structure of UNGIWG and improved the definition of the task and responsibilities of its the different bodies: Secretariat, Chair, Task Group Managers and Focal Points.

## ***Opening plenary session***

### ***Welcome, report from the Secretariat and the Chair***

#### **A. Welcome**

The Fifth UNGIWG Plenary was opened, as scheduled, on the morning of 12 October 2004. The World Health Organization (WHO) hosted the plenary at WHO Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. The list of participants is attached as Annex I. Representatives from CTBTO, DPI (Map Library), DPKO (Cartographic Section, the UNMEE, UNMIL, ONUB and MONUC GIS Units), FAO, UNECA, UNECE, UNEP, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNITAR-UNOSAT, UN ITCY, UNMOVIC, UNODC, UNOOSA, WFP, WHO, and regional office representatives of WHO, UNDP (Afghanistan) registered for the meeting, bringing the number of participating Member Agencies to above 50% of the total membership once again, and making a quorum for eventual decisions to be taken. Representatives from governmental agencies (Brunei Darussalam Survey Department, EU-NATO) as well as from the private sector (ESRI, Leica Geosystems GIS and Mapping and Spot Image) also attended the first two days of the meeting. A complete list of the acronyms used in this document can be found in Annex VI.

The co-Chairs representing WHO and UNEP/DEWA welcomed the participants, highlighting in their opening remarks the large amount of important issues that needed to be discussed during this fifth meeting. Mr Steve Lonergan, UNEP/DEWA who was not able to attend this meeting was represented by Mr Johannes Akiwumi.

The provisional agenda provided by WHO was adopted with some changes. The final agenda of the plenary, as approved, is available in Annex II of this document.

## **B. Report of the UNGIWG Secretariat**

Mr Hiroshi Murakami, Chief of the Cartographic Section at UN Headquarters, presented the report of the Secretariat on activities related to the Working Group for this past year. The report is transcribed in detail in Annex III.

## **C. Reports from the co-Chairs**

Mr Akiwumi informed the participants of some of the outputs of the Task Group meeting that took place prior to the plenary, on 11 October 2004:

- having co-Chairs is not a good idea;
- the process of UNGIWG is political rather than technical, therefore two types of meeting could take place: purely technical meetings alternating with technical and policy driven meetings);
- some of the tasks of the Working Group have to be refined;
- participants should consider other ways of collaborating with colleagues regarding particular issues. Mr Akiwumi mentioned that he sometimes found it difficult to participate in Task Group activities.

Dr Zagaria then expressed his wish to have the 33 agencies of UNGIWG working together. Underlining the importance of the structure of UNGIWG, he invited participants to think about how UNGIWG should move forward, and in order to discuss such issues would need the last year activities report of the Task Groups. Dr Zagaria also outlined two challenges for this meeting:

- 1st challenge: Agencies should take the responsibility of the layers that are connected to their own area of work (e.g.: WHO).
- 2nd challenge: UNGIWG has to link the technical issue to the strategic vision in order to leverage funding (e.g. for the Secretariat).

Finally, Dr Zagaria emphasized the fact that UNGIWG should have one lead agency, rather than two.

## **D. Reports of the current Task Groups**

At the end of the Fourth Plenary Meeting, the list of the existing Task Groups was revisited in order to contain five Task Groups covering two specific areas of work:

1. Core data
  - 1.1 International and Administrative Boundaries;
  - 1.2 Core Geo Database;
  - 1.3 Remote sensing.
2. Standards
  - 2.1 Interoperable services;
  - 2.2 GIS Map Production Guidelines.

The reports of activities of these Task Groups for the past year are reported in Annex IV.

Additional information was provided to the participants during the presentation of the reports and short discussions specific to each Task Group also took place at the end of each report.

The summary of the major information and points raised for each Task Group is mentioned here.

The report of the Task Group for International and Administrative Boundaries was complemented by a demonstration of the content of its web site (launched one week before the meeting), and information given regarding the clearance process to be followed in order to use the maps. The question of the redistribution control was also raised. In answer to this question, Mr Murakami again emphasized the sensitivity of this issue and the necessity of keeping this material within the UN system for the moment, and not to consider this material as the "UN view" but as a practice within the UN. Participants asked for more recognition of the work done by the UN Cartographic Section and proposed different solutions to authorize its use by the largest possible group of users (beta version, put a copyright on it, etc.). It was finally proposed that a clear recommendation should be formulated during the meeting regarding the A4 page template that has been generated (see Annex IV).

During the discussion about administrative boundaries, the willingness to make the data set "reach the present" was proposed as an objective. In order to achieve this proposed objective the WHO co-Chair asked the participants to think about a pooling resource system in order to sustain this activity. The need to prioritize the areas to be finalized first was raised (hot spots) and the issues of copyright and intellectual property identified as a potential new area of work for UNGIWG, especially due to the growing number of available internet base mapping services.

The report from the Core Geo Database Task Group had been completed, providing information connected to work done at FAO, including the hierarchy of the maps in the Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Information and Mapping System Global GIS Database (FGGD) as well as some issues related to the generation of global level maps such as the pixelization, exclusion of some areas depending on the resolution, problems of overlay. Some feedback was provided by the participants including the possibility of accessing an online directory of the resources highlighted by this report. Several additional data sets for possible sources for the inventory were proposed by the participants (navigation routes, earthquakes monitoring database, UNECE road network, etc.).

The report from the Remote Sensing Task Group was complemented by a demonstration of the online metadata catalogue system for very high resolution satellite images. This system allows anyone within the UN who has purchased a scene to upload the corresponding information, thus reducing the duplication of purchases. This issue was discussed further and resulted in a wish to know more about existing duplication of purchases (e.g. in Iraq).

The following recommendations were proposed:

- generation of guidelines to be used by country offices when they want to buy images;
- a mention to the CEB from the Working Group regarding this duplication of effort;
- compressing images in order to improve their sharing. As only individual letters from members of UNGIWG and participants had been sent to the US government regarding the continuity of the Landsat programme, it was decided to send a collective letter.

Regarding interoperable services, the existence of the Open Geospatial Consortium (OGC) Cook Book for guiding people willing to implement an on-line mapping service has been mentioned. There is some capacity but problems such as the management of the time dimensions remain.

The first topic of the discussion that followed the report of the GIS Map Production Guidelines Task Group was the possibility of including issues related to online mapping in it as well as joining the two documents compiled by the Task Group so far (see Annex IV). The importance of these documents has been underlined, asking for the selection of a sub-set of recommendation to be applied within UNGIWG (e.g. projection, cell size, etc.). This led to a discussion regarding the possible generation of a process for the generation and use of recommendation produced by UNGIWG. It has also been requested to take action in order to make these recommendations, once accepted, more visible as outputs from UNGIWG.