

NEWSLETTER GLOBAL MAPPING 21

United Nations Geographic Information Working Group (UNGIWG)

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Dr. Murakami at right

The United Nations has been working on the coordinated use and development of geographic information. This article briefly introduces its activity and recent development.

Most agencies and programmes in the UN system use geographic information for their substantive projects including peacekeeping operations and humanitarian assistance as well as global demographic and environmental analyses. The increasing complexity of the operational requirements and the rapid technological development have been a driving force in the Organisation to further apply geographic information to their programmes. However, such information is often either lacking or outdated, where it exists, there is uncoordinated use of geographic information between projects conducted by different agencies.

In an attempt to improve the situation, informal working group meetings had been held at Headquarters by Mr. Miklos Pinther, the former Chief of the Cartographic Section, since 1996, in order to address common problems and keep up with emerging technological changes. This attempt was well received within

the Organisation and it enlisted strong support for forming a system-wide formal working group. These efforts finally led to the establishment of the United Nations Geographic Information Working Group (UNGIWG) in March 2000. Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, acknowledged the relevance of UNGIWG in his keynote address at the meeting of the Association of American Geographers (AAG) held in New York on 1 March 2001. In his words, "last year we at the United Nations established a Geographic Information Working Group to improve the way in which the many entities in our far-flung system use cartographic and geographic information. One of the Group's main goals is to establish a common UN Geographic Database. It will be working with national mapping agencies, non-governmental organisations, industry groups and research institutions."

With recognition and support at the highest level in the UN, the Cartographic Section organised the second meeting of UNGIWG, which was held on 5 - 7 March

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ISCGM Mourns the Loss of Professor John E. Estes



Professor John (Jack) E. Estes, Chairperson of the International Steering Committee for Global Mapping, passed away suddenly on 9th March 2001 after a fight against cancer.

Jack had been at UC Santa Barbara since 1969 and was a professor of Geography and the Director of the Geography Remote Sensing Research Unit. His primary research interests revolved around the fundamental and applied aspects of the use of remote sensing and GIS technology for the analysis of earth resources.

Jack had been a scientist of far-reaching vision and global perspective. He served the International Steering Committee of Global Mapping as Chairperson ever since its inception, during which importance and significance of the Global Mapping have been increasingly recognized worldwide in terms of resource management, environmental protection and disaster prevention, etc. His tireless efforts and his vast knowledge together with his impressive personality had always been the driving force of this ever expanding Global Mapping Project. Beyond personal or national interest he envisioned the globe where individual nation can enjoy the equal opportunity and merit of modern technologies, thus contributing to the ultimate welfare and happiness of the whole earth.

Global Mapping made its steady evolution all the way with Jack.

In November 1994, the International Workshop on Global Mapping was held in Izumo, Japan, which marked the starting point of this internationally collaborative initiative. Jack participated in the workshop as one of the nineteen experts convened from worldwide and vigorously contributed to drafting the Resolution of Izumo Workshop, which defined the fundamental principles of Global Mapping, incorporating his idea on responsibility of map makers for global environmental issues.

In February 1996, fifteen months after Izumo, the Second International Workshop on Global Mapping was held in Tsukuba, Japan, in which the International Steering Committee for Global Mapping was established. Jack was elected unanimously as the first Chairperson of the committee. Jack had guided the committee with his strong leadership onto the right track during its formative stage.

In November 1996, the Interregional Seminar on Global Mapping for Implementation of Multinational Environmental Agreements was held in UCSB jointly organized by the United Nations, UCSB and the Government of Japan. Jack chaired the seminar and concluded with a declaration of the Santa Barbara Statement.

As the chairperson of ISCGM, Jack presided seven ISCGM meetings from February 1996 in Tsukuba to May 2000 in Cape Town, Forums in Gifu, Japan in

1997 and in Sioux Falls in 1998 as well as ad-hoc meetings and working group meetings. Jack also actively promoted Global Mapping on every possible occasion of academic and professional conferences and the United Nations' conferences.

In 1998, Jack sent a letter through the UN inviting all National Mapping Organizations of the world to participate in Global Mapping. In response to his call 83 countries have participated in Global Mapping, which importantly covers two thirds of the global land.

The ideas and views he embraced are not yet the complete reality but they are steadily on the way. It is our great consolation to know that Jack could confirm the progress at the last Global Mapping Forum in Hiroshima, Japan, November 2000, commemorating the completion of the first phase of Global Mapping and the start of releasing the initial outcome of this initiative. He presided and conducted the forum most vigorously and professionally to a memorable success despite a certain malaise he may have felt off the con-

ference hall. His words still ring in our ears and encourage us to stand up and continue the way of Global Mapping he has cut through into the new century and fully exploit its enormous potential.

With sincere thanks and appreciation to the soul of Jack, let us quote one sentence from his opening address of the Forum:

"Because, one thing that we may forget but we should never forget is that the earth is the only known closed life support system that has been shown to support life for more than decades of time frames. It is precious and we need to understand it. Mapping is fundamental to the understanding of the working of this system, and I look forward to the provision of Global Map data for enhancing our understanding."

John E. Estes, 28 November 2000
(in the opening address of Global Mapping Forum
2000 in Hiroshima)

The Seventh United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for the Americas

The 7th UNRCC for the Americas was held in New York from 22 to 26 January 2001. This is the first UNRCC-Am Conference since the Permanent Committee on Spatial Data Infrastructure for the Americas (PCIDEA) was established. Accordingly, SDI is the major keynote throughout the conference. Dr. John Kelmelis of USGS gave an invited presentation on Global Mapping at the opening session. Report from ISCGM was also presented by Mr. Minoru Akiyama, the Secretary General of ISCGM. Besides, many reports and presentations referred to Global Mapping in connection with SDI development and applications. The conference concluded with ten resolutions including Global Mapping, which states as follows.

Resolution on Global Map

- Noting the development of Global Map as a significant contribution for the implementation of Agenda 21,

- Noting with appreciation that the Global Map version 1.0 data sets are completed and made available for an initial group of nations,
- Recognizing that the development of the Global Map contributes to the development of a Regional Spatial Data Infrastructure for the Americas, the Global Spatial Data Infrastructure work plan, the UN Geographic Database and other SDI initiatives, which are vital for sustainable development and improved mitigation of natural disasters,
- Recommends to member States not contributing to the Global Map project, to consider participation with the assistance of International Steering Committee for Global Mapping (ISCGM) and PC-IDEA,
- Further recommends to the forthcoming 8th ISCGM Meeting to reconsider, when evaluating GM Phase 2, the issues concerning GM specifications, in accordance to user requirements at the national, regional and global levels.

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2001. The meeting was hosted by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) at FAO headquarters in Rome, and was attended by nearly 100 participants, representing various UN departments, agencies and programmes, as well as national mapping organisations, international non-governmental organisations and industry. To advance and implement the resolution adopted at the first meeting, seven task forces were established at this meeting to identify the short-term tasks to be focused on in the coming year. The terms of reference were also approved and it was agreed that work should begin on a strategic plan for UNGIWG. More information on UNGIWG may be obtained at the Cartographic Section's website: <http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/english/htmain.htm>. Throughout the meeting, the participants reaffirmed

support for establishing a common geographic database in the UN system. However, this database may not be developed and maintained by the United Nations alone without any support from related national, regional and international organisations. In this context, we greatly appreciate the initiative taken and the achievement made by the ISCGM for Global Mapping, and hope to strengthen collaboration in our common endeavour toward the development of a global geographic database. And very recently, our proposal on the programme development of a UN geographic database has been approved for funding by the UN Foundation. It is expected that this fund will facilitate further cooperation between related initiatives as well as actually develop a geographic database for wider use in the UN system.

Status of Participation in Global Mapping

Status of participation in Global Mapping

As of March 25, 2001

Number of countries/regions participated in Global Mapping

83 countries/regions

Number of countries/regions considering the participation

35 countries/regions

Recent participation in Global Mapping

Name of organization

Country name

Date of participation

Centro Nacional de Registros (CNR) Institute Geografico Nacional

El Salvador

February 22nd

The Government Survey Department

Antigua and Barbuda

February 27th

Global Map and Related Meetings

Followings are Global Map and related meetings. Information on related meetings will be highly appreciated.

2001

- 16-27 April, New York, USA
Commission on Sustainable Development 9th Session
- 24-27 April, Tsukuba, Japan
7th PCGIAP Meeting
- 6-11 May, Seoul, Korea
FIG Working Week 2001
- 22-24 May, Cartagena, Colombia
5th GSDI Meeting

- 25 May, Cartagena, Colombia
8th Meeting of ISCGM
- 24-28 June, Fredericton, Canada
2nd International Symposium on Digital Earth
<http://www.digitalearth.ca>
- 6-10 August, Beijing, China
20th International Cartographic Conference

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