

Global Earth Observation moves ahead

September 28 2004

The intergovernmental Group on Earth Observations (GEO) met this week to agree important elements of a groundbreaking 10-year Plan that will pave the way toward building a global Earth Observation System.

Over the next decade, this system will revolutionize our understanding of the Earth and how it works. With benefits as broad as the planet itself, this initiative promises to make peoples and economies around the globe healthier, safer and better equipped to manage basic daily needs. The aim is to create an observing system as interrelated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects providing the science on which sound policy and decision-making can be built. The 10-Year Plan is set to be adopted at the 3rd Earth Observation Summit in Brussels next February - the highlight in a nine-day public “Earth & Space Week” devoted to raising awareness of the important role that Earth observation & space play in our society.

“The self-interest for the global community is clear,” said Achilleas Mitsos, Director-General for Research at the European Commission, and one of the four Co-Chairs of the GEO, “We are talking about nothing less than the future prosperity and security of the citizens of our world, so we must build in the following months a robust, workable and sustainable plan for the next decade. The European initiative on Global Monitoring for Environment and Security (GMES) will form an important contribution.”

The devil’s in the detail

In the run up to the Third Earth Observation Summit, the GEO convened

for a special session on 27-28 September in Brussels to discuss and finalise key aspects related to the issue of governance and the 10-Year Plan. As with most international agreements, a successful consensus on the issue of how the Plan will be governed is critical to it being carried out successfully by all parties. The GEO plans to meet again in late November in Ottawa, Canada to finalise the Plan actions.

Earth & Space Week Announced

On the occasion of the GEO special session, Mitsos, in his role as one of the four GEO Co-chairs, officially announced that the European Commission with the collaboration of the European Space Agency (ESA) will host the first “Earth & Space Week” from 12-20 February 2005 in Brussels. Earth & Space Week will feature a broad spectrum of activities - from ministerial-level events like the Summit and an International Conference on Cooperation in Space to a major public Earth & Space Exposition. The week is designed to stimulate an awareness, understanding and appreciation of how Earth observation and Space initiatives help to improve the quality of life on our planet.

Source: European Commission, Research Directorate

Citation: Global Earth Observation moves ahead (2004, September 28) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2004-09-global-earth.html>

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