

EARTH OBSERVATION SUMMIT

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U.S.-HOSTED SUMMIT BRINGS NATIONS TOGETHER TO TAKE THE PULSE OF PLANET EARTH

More than 30 nations came together today to realize a common goal – to establish an international, comprehensive, coordinated and sustained Earth observation system. The new system is aimed at providing critical scientific data needed to address important global economic, social and scientific challenges. With this improved knowledge, decision-makers around the world will be able to make more informed decisions regarding climate, the environment, and a host of other economic and social issues that are affected by Earth and climate systems.

The Earth Observation Summit, hosted by the United States at the U.S. Department of State, marks an important milestone in the development of a comprehensive Earth observing system. By bringing together ministerial-level representatives from developed and developing countries with an interest and significant role in observing systems as well as representatives from international organizations such as the World Bank and the World Meteorological Organization, the summit promises to raise visibility for the issue with international decision-makers and ensure a new level of cooperation and investment in Earth observing systems.

The program included participation from several U.S. Cabinet officials including Secretary of State Colin Powell, Department of Commerce Secretary Don Evans, and Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham. Joining them, the President's Science Advisor, Dr. John Marburger, provided remarks, and the Chairman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, James Connaughton, presented the policy context on environmental and economic security. During the afternoon program NASA Administrator Sean O'Keefe, Interior Secretary Gale Norton, and Acting EPA Administrator Marianne Horinko offered perspectives on the U.S. vision for a comprehensive Earth observation system.

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At the 2003 G-8 Summit in Evian, France, the G-8 Action Plan on Science and Technology for Sustainable Development called for strengthening international cooperation on global observation and listed a number of specific activities. International calls for greater integration of earth observation systems have also been made at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, the 2001 UN Commission on Sustainable Development, and the 1992 Earth Summit.

Today, the heads of national delegations participating in the summit adopted a declaration that calls for a commitment to developing a comprehensive, coordinated Earth observation system, reaffirms the need for Earth systems data and information for sound decision-making, sets forth principles for long-term cooperation in meeting these goals and commits to improving earth observation systems and scientific support in developing countries. The declaration also calls for establishing an intergovernmental working group to prepare a ten-year implementation plan for a comprehensive, coordinated Earth observation system.

The intergovernmental ad hoc working group on Earth observations (GEO) will hold its first planning meeting tomorrow. The United States will be represented in the working group by retired Navy Vice Adm. Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Ph.D., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator, and his alternate, Dr. Charles Groat, director of the U.S. Geological Survey.

“The U.S. and our international partners have made significant strides in putting systems in place to monitor the Earth, but crucial data gaps remain,” said Commerce Secretary Don Evans. “The world’s oceans cover 70 percent of the planet and drive climate trends that affect every nation of the globe, yet they are sparsely monitored and poorly understood. The Earth Observation Summit creates an international coalition to address emerging global issues and lays the groundwork for improved environmental decision-making and economic growth and prosperity.”

“The commitment of the US and our international partners to work together to develop the framework of a comprehensive, coordinated observation system will address critical needs of both the scientific and policy communities,” said Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham. “Such an Earth observation system will help us all to be sensible stewards of our planet.”

With more than \$3 trillion of U.S. GDP affected by climate and weather, including the agriculture, energy, construction, travel and transportation industry sectors, there are powerful economic as well as environmental incentives for gaining a greater understanding of these phenomena. The United States has already made significant investments in space and *in situ* or surface-based observing systems, including our ability to monitor the ozone layer using spacecraft and aircraft and the TAO/Triton Array of buoys that have helped forecast the most recent El Niño six months in advance.

In addition, international organizations such as the WMO have played a leadership role in developing the global observing system of the World Weather Watch with over 10,000 surface stations around the globe. Other monitoring systems in development include Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS), Global Climate Observing System (GCOS), Global Atmosphere Watch and the Global Terrestrial Observing System (GTOS). These disparate systems provide critical data, but linking them and expanding them will add considerable power to an already impressive data collection effort and a quantum leap in our ability to predict and manage Earth system cycles and processes.

The improved observations will offer better data for improved models. These models are expected to yield advancements in Earth science and observations for many applications including more accurate predictions of climate change, crop production, energy and water use, disease outbreaks and natural hazards. The Earth Observation Summit begins a new era for harnessing the world's scientific and technical knowledge to take the pulse of the planet and provide new products and services that will help protect our environment and improve the quality of our lives.

For more information on the Earth Observation Summit, please visit:
www.earthobservationsummit.gov.

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