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**HISTORIC GLOBAL EARTH OBSERVATION PLAN LAUNCHED IN BRUSSELS  
NEARLY 60 COUNTRIES AGREE TO 'TAKE PULSE OF THE PLANET'**

Nearly 60 countries and the European Commission today agreed to a plan that, over the next 10 years, will revolutionize our understanding of Earth and how it works. Agreement for a 10-year implementation plan for a Global Earth Observation System of Systems, known as GEOSS, was reached by member countries of the Group on Earth Observations at the Third Earth Observation Summit held today in Brussels. Nearly 40 international organizations also support the emerging global network.

In just 18 months, from the first-ever Earth Observation Summit held on July 31, 2003 in Washington, D.C., the number of participating countries has nearly doubled, and interest has accelerated since the recent tsunami tragedy devastated parts of Asia and Africa. In the coming months, more countries and global organizations are expected to join the historic initiative.

"By adopting an implementation plan for the GEOSS, we have accomplished the first phase of realizing our goal of developing a comprehensive, integrated and sustained Earth Observation System so that the world can better predict weather and climate, prepare for natural hazards and protect people and property. Today's action is a true milestone," said U.S. Commerce Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez. Gutierrez is in Brussels leading the U.S. Delegation to Earth Observation Summit III.

"Over the next decade, I believe we will look back at this period, at the beginnings of GEOSS, and recognize what an enormous turning point it represents in the scientific understanding of our planet," said retired Vice Admiral Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Jr., Ph.D., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. "The goal of the United States, and every country participating in GEOSS, is to ensure that this understanding leads to improved operational capabilities that will be put to work for the benefit of people throughout the world and the economies they depend on," he said.

Lautenbacher is one of four international co-chairs of the Group on Earth Observations. Also co-chairing are: Achilleas Mitsos, director general for research, European Commission, which hosted the Brussels summit; Tetuhisa Shirakawa, deputy minister of education, culture, sports, science and technology, Japan; and Dr. Rob Adam, director-general of science and technology, South Africa.

By linking existing technology that is already demonstrating value around the globe, and supporting the building of new observation capacities where required, GEOSS will provide a planning framework for systems, data and vital information so scientists and policy makers in many different countries can design, implement and operate systems in a compatible way.

GEOSS will, for example, help better monitor and record drought and its severity, ensuring that policy makers can make more informed decisions about allocating resources. Such information will help determine which farms should be irrigated, when drainage basins are parched and require upstream water resources, and how to more effectively evaluate soil moisture levels to better assess crop productivity.

In addition to serving to mitigate tsunamis and other natural disasters, GEOSS will allow winter weather forecasts months in advance, better climate forecasts, dramatic cuts in energy costs, predictions of where and when outbreaks of malaria, SARS and West Nile virus are likely to hit, and more effective monitoring of air quality and wildfires. Among numerous other benefits to the United States and people and countries around the globe, GEOSS will also help predict the pattern of the North American monsoon. Arizona derives two-thirds of its water from the monsoon weather pattern.

Lautenbacher called GEOSS “an excellent example of science serving society. “Offering benefits nearly as broad the planet itself, GEOSS will, over time, provide an important scientific basis for making sound policy and decisions in every sector of our society – energy, public health, agriculture, transportation and numerous other areas that shape the quality of everyday life and the capability to address natural disasters in the United States and every part of the world,” he said.

NOAA, the Commerce Department’s National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation’s coastal and marine resources.

On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov/>

NOAA’s Earth Observing System: <http://www.noaa.gov/eos.html>