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CIRCULAR LETTER 38/2016
16 August 2016

**SIXTH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS
ON GLOBAL GEOSPATIAL INFORMATION MANAGEMENT (UN-GGIM)**

Reference: IHO CL 57/2015 dated 11 August - *Report on the fifth Session of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management*

Dear Hydrographer,

1. This Circular Letter provides a summary of the key outcomes of the sixth Session of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) that took place at the UN Headquarters in New York, USA from 3 to 6 August, as announced at the Reference.
2. The United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) reports to the UN General Assembly via the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The principal purpose of the UN-GGIM is to play a leading role in setting the agenda for the development of global geospatial information management and to promote the use of geospatial information in addressing key global challenges, particularly taking into account the role of geospatial data in monitoring and achieving the Sustainable Development goals agreed under the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
3. The sixth Session of the UN-GGIM (UN-GGIM6) was preceded by 28 associated side meetings covering regional GGIM meetings and discussions in support of several working groups supporting the GGIM.
4. Nearly 300 participants representing more than 80 UN Member States and Observer Organizations, including the IHO, participated in the Session. A representative of the US Hydrographic Office (Office of Coast Survey) was present in the US delegation. The Hydrographic Offices of Cuba, New Zealand, Oman and the Philippines were, in effect, represented since their national delegations were led by their parent organizations. The President of the Directing Committee represented the IHO.

Topics of relevance to the IHO

5. A number of the items on the agenda of UN-GGIM6 were of direct relevance to IHO Member States, particularly in relation to the potential contribution of hydrographic data and services to national and regional spatial data infrastructures.
6. **Use of Geospatial Standards.** Progress in the development and maintenance of relevant IHO standards was presented to the Committee as part of a combined report of the IHO, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the Open Geospatial Consortium (OGC). The Committee expressed its thanks for the continuing work of the IHO, ISO and OGC with respect to standards, harmonization and implementation, and the usefulness of the two reference documents produced by the three organizations and adopted by the UN-GGIM. Several Member States indicated that the reference documents are now being used as a means of highlighting the fundamental importance of the adoption and use of geospatial standards in order to enhance data inter-operability and access in their countries.

7. **Fundamental Data Themes.** The Committee reviewed the progress being made by its working group (WG) on global fundamental geospatial data themes. The WG was invited to report its progress to the next session. It seems most likely that “elevation/depth” will eventually be endorsed by the UN as one of the most fundamental of the data sets. In the view of the Directing Committee, this would acknowledge the fundamental importance of elevation and depth data to national geospatial data infrastructures. At the same time, it is likely to increase pressure to make such data widely accessible and either free or very affordable – a trend which appears to be gaining ground among UN-GGIM representatives already.

8. **Open Data, Data Sharing and Volunteered Geographic Information.** The Committee reconfirmed its acknowledgment that open data, data sharing policies, and the use of volunteered geographic information (crowd-sourcing) are critical to advancing the use of geospatial information. These are subjects that are already being addressed by the IHO under the purview of the Marine Spatial Data Infrastructure Working Group (MSDIWG) and the Crowd-Sourced Bathymetry Working Group (CSBWG).

9. **Geospatial Information related to Land (and Marine) Administration and Management.** The Committee’s Expert Group on the Application of Geospatial Information related to Land Administration and Management, provided its report and observations. The IHO representative drew the Committee’s attention to the fact that the subjects under consideration of its expert group applied equally to the coastal areas, seas and oceans. He drew attention to the ongoing work in the IHO of assisting Member States to contribute to national and regional spatial data infrastructures and invited the Committee to consider whether the scope of study should be widened beyond the terrestrial domain to specifically include coastal waters, the seas and the oceans. As a result, the Committee:

... recognized the need to consider the marine environment – shorelines, coastal waters, seas and oceans – as a key component of the spatial data infrastructure that underpins the administration and management of land, marine spaces, and the national geospatial resources of many littoral Member States.

10. The IHO has now been invited to participate in the working group on Global Fundamental Geospatial Data Themes and the Expert Group on the Application of Geospatial Information related to Land Administration and Management, in order to present the maritime and hydrographic perspective.

Awareness of Hydrography in UN-GGIM

11. The Directing Committee notes that among the UN-GGIM delegations, knowledge or recognition of the fundamental value of hydrographic data and the significant achievements of the hydrographic (IHO) community in relation to the development and universal implementation of international standards, our successful regional cooperation and coordination mechanisms, and our increasing capacity building efforts remains very low. Most States are represented in the UN-GGIM by their national land administrations that appear to have little or no contact or cooperation with their national hydrographic office counterparts. In this context, IHO Member States are encouraged to consider ensuring that their delegations at UN-GGIM and related regional groups are appropriately briefed on relevant hydrographic aspects of the work of the UN-GGIM and even to consider seeking to join their respective delegations.

Next session of GGIM

12. The seventh Session of UN-GGIM will take place at the UN Headquarters during the first week of August 2017.

Documentation

13. Copies of all the papers and the report of the meeting are available on the GGIM website at: <http://ggim.un.org>

On behalf of the Directing Committee

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Robert Ward', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Robert WARD
President