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INTEGRATED GLOBAL OBSERVING STRATEGY (IGOS)

IGOS PARTNERS

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COORDINATION WITH CONVENTION SECRETARIATS

(Submitted by UNEP)

Summary and purpose of document: This document reports on the progress in and further potential for working relationships between the IGOS Partners and the environmental Conventions as significant potential users of environmental observations at the international level.

1. One aim of the IGOS Partnership is to make the observing systems more user driven and to encourage a dialogue with the principal user groups such as the multilateral environmental agreements. The Rio Conventions in particular have significant information and reporting requirements that will require an adequate base of environmental data collected routinely on a long-term basis to measure progress under the conventions. Many other Conventions could also

be well served by an effective system of environmental observations.

2. The dialogue that began the earliest and has gone the furthest is that between the Global Climate Observing System (GCOS) and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Since this is being reported on separately under Agenda Item 8.1, it is not covered here, but it does serve as an example of the potential relationships in this area.

3. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has been mandated to strengthen coordination among the environmental conventions, and it organizes periodic meetings for this purpose. UNEP has therefore taken the lead to initiate a dialogue between the IGOS Partners and the other Convention Secretariats and their subsidiary bodies.

4. On 25 October 1999, the UNEP Division of Environmental Conventions organized the First Meeting of the Scientific and Technical Subsidiary Bodies of International Environmental Conventions on the margins of the Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC in Bonn, Germany. In addition to discussing modalities for collaboration and areas of common concern, the agenda included a presentation by representatives of the IGOS Partnership, and a discussion on possible contributions that IGOS could make to meeting the information and data needs of environmental conventions. While the report of this meeting has yet to be published, the general response was very positive, and has created opportunities for more direct discussions with individual subsidiary bodies and convention secretariats. Future meetings among subsidiary bodies are being planned, but no specific dates have yet been set. In addition, UNEP organizes meetings among convention secretariats, and for the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans.

5. There have also been meetings addressing the need for linkages among the conventions, both in terms of their substantive areas of interest and with respect to their operations. In July 1999, the United Nations University (UNU) organized a meeting on Inter-linkages – Synergies and Coordination between Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). In October 1999, immediately after the meeting of subsidiary bodies, UNEP held a Meeting to Assess the Need for a Second Inter-linkages Assessment. The latter suggested that the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment include a section on Inter-linkages, as follow-up to the recent Linkages Report (NASA, UNEP, World Bank).

6. These meetings have raised three broad issues that are relevant to IGOS:

- harmonizing information systems and information exchanges, such as the joint biodiversity website;
- coordinating the work of the subsidiary bodies of Conventions;
- streamlining National Reporting and encouraging coordinated national approaches, to reduce the burden on national governments of reporting to many different conventions.

7. In the absence of other relevant events scheduled with the conventions in the immediate future, the IGOS Partners may wish to consider several lines of action:

- Identify issues for which more comprehensive information will be required: forests, dry lands, climate change impacts (terrestrial and oceanic), status and changes in ecosystems, perhaps with a view to their becoming IGOS themes;
- Develop partnerships with specific MEAs to examine information needs and availability on an ongoing basis;
- Improve awareness among the conventions of IGOS activities and what information it can provide;
- Attend future inter-linkages meetings where data issues are discussed.

8. Another area where the relationship with users, including the conventions, can be developed is through the consideration by the Commission for Sustainable Development of Information for Decision-making and Participation (Chapter 40 of Agenda 21) as its major cross-cutting theme at its ninth session in April 2001. This includes the programme area of Agenda 21 on Bridging the Data Gap. In preparation for this meeting, UNEP is planning to organize a technical meeting to discuss core data sets required for international assessment processes and reports, probably in late July. In September, the Canadian government will be hosting a Workshop on Preparations for CSD-9 on Information for Decision-making bringing together experts from governments and relevant information sectors. The results of these meetings will be fed into the Secretary General's report to the CSD on this topic. There are also plans for computer demonstrations at the CSD itself of new technologies and systems providing information for decision-making.

9. CSD-9 is thus an opportunity for the IGOS Partners to identify specific messages that they wish to communicate to the broader range of government interests involved in sustainable development, such as the need for direct financial support for operational observations independent of research budgets, and the frequent lack of adequate institutional structures at the national level to be responsible for developing and maintaining long-term time series of environmental data and imagery. The Partners may wish to designate representatives to take an active role in the preparatory process for CSD-9, as well as specific points to be proposed to UN DESA and UNEP, as the task managers for this theme, for possible inclusion in the Secretary-General's report.

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