Remarks to GEO-VI Plenary on U.S. National Activities in Earth Observation and the USGEO Progress Report

Ronald Reagan Building

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for Oceans and Atmosphere

As Delivered, 5 minutes

1. Thank you, Madam Chair. Good morning, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

2. It is my great pleasure to be here today and to represent the United States government in this important assembly. I am Dr. Jane Lubchenco, and I serve as the Undersecretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and as Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. I want to echo the remarks of Dr. Holdren as well as those of Shere Abbott, my good friend and colleague, in welcoming all of you to the United States.

3. Before providing you with an update on our national activities, I want to note that I will be joined today on the U.S. delegation by my colleagues from the White House, NASA, the U.S. Geological Survey, the National Science Foundation, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of State, and over 15 other federal agencies that collectively participate in the United States Group on Earth Observations, or USGEO. We see this broad participation in our delegation as reflective of our government-wide commitment to GEO.

4. The environmental information that decision-makers need requires robust Earth observations. The U.S. government recognizes the need for a coordinated approach to sustain and build on the current set of Earth observations available today.

5. We also consider data from civil Earth observations to be a global public good. Consequently, we promote a policy of full, open, and

timely access to these data. This open data policy, along with our investment in Earth observations, demonstrates our strong commitment to the goals of GEO and GEOSS. The U.S. is working with other governments to ensure free and fully available data, to promote timely data access, and to encourage other nations to open up previously unavailable data sets.

6. In this spirit, in late 2008, the U.S. opened the LANDSAT archive to the entire world free of charge. This data set provides a 37-year record of moderate-resolution land imaging data for a wide range of applications. I am pleased to report that since opening the archive, over 1 million images have been provided to users from 180 countries – a resounding success.

7. The opening of the LANDSAT archive is just one example of the significant progress the United States has made in expanding the application and use of Earth observations in a number of critically

important areas. These are outlined in the USGEO Progress Report which has been distributed to each delegation. I would like to call attention to several items in this report:

a. But first, I wish to begin with a special announcement. In 2005, the United States took the unusual step of moving the Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellite-10 (GOES-10) from its normal orbital position to 60 degrees West, to support South America. GOES-10 is now planned to be decommissioned on December 1, 2009, when it will be out of fuel. I am pleased to announce that the US has decided to replace GOES-10 with the GOES-12 satellite. Replacing GOES-10 with GOES-12 is critical to South American users, allowing them to continue crucial satellite detection of severe storms, floods, drought, landslides, and wildfires.

b. The United States remains committed to continuing and strengthening successful capacity building projects in a variety of domains. U.S. agencies are partnering with other countries to apply Earth observation data to address air quality and public health problems through the AirNow International program. We are also enhancing current monitoring capabilities for food security and famine early warning through the efforts of the United States' Global Agriculture Monitoring initiative.

c. In the rapidly changing polar regions, the United States recently funded and launched a six-year campaign to study changes to Antarctica's sea ice, glaciers, and ice sheets. *Operation Ice Bridge* will repeatedly study selected key targets that are most prone to change, providing essential data on changes in ice elevation. The first *Operation Ice Bridge* airborne campaign over Greenland and the Arctic

Ocean occurred earlier this year, and Arctic flights will resume in spring 2010.

8. Despite excellent progress in all these areas, much more needs to be done, and we are committed to working with our partners in GEO to continue this important work. One area of particular importance for GEO, where I suggest future work should be considered, is in the realm of marine biology and ecosystems. The continuing decline of coastal, estuarine, and marine ecosystems worldwide signals the urgency to assist policy makers and resource managers in addressing these challenges through sustained and integrated observations of these ecosystems. To adequately monitor the complexities of marine and coastal ecosystems, additional capability is needed to obtain necessary measurements. I encourage our fellow GEO Member countries to explore additional work in this area.

9. As we move toward the GEO 2010 Ministerial, the United States looks forward to continuing our collaboration in all the areas I've mentioned, as well many others. We recognize that the realization of GEOSS requires engagement not just over the next few days, but in the longer-term as well. We stand ready to work side by side with the governments and organizations gathered in GEO to achieve our objective of comprehensive observation and understanding of the Earth system for the benefit of society. Thank you, Madam Chair.