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UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

**Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice**

**Thirty-fifth session**

**Durban, 28 November to 3 December 2011**

Item 6 of the provisional agenda

**Research and systematic observation**

**Summary on progress in the development of methodologies,  
standards and protocols for climate-related terrestrial  
observations and related matters**

**Submission from the secretariat of the Global Terrestrial Observing  
System**

1. The Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA), at its thirty-third session, welcomed the report by the Global Terrestrial Observing System (GTOS) on the framework for climate-related terrestrial observations and the workplan on the development of standards and protocols for the terrestrial essential climate variables assessed. It encouraged the GTOS to continue coordinating the development of methodologies for climate-related terrestrial observations and to continue working with its sponsors and the International Organization for Standardization, and in broad consultation with relevant partners, towards implementation of that workplan, including through mobilization of the necessary resources.<sup>1</sup>
2. The SBSTA invited the GTOS to report at the thirty-fifth session of the SBSTA on progress made on the matters referred to in paragraph 1 above, as well as on matters related to, inter alia, development of terrestrial standards and improvements of terrestrial networks, and synergy with ongoing relevant initiatives.<sup>2</sup>
3. At its thirty-fourth session, the SBSTA agreed to defer its consideration of matters related to systematic observation to its thirty-sixth session.<sup>3</sup>
4. In response to the invitation referred to in paragraph 2 above, the secretariat of the GTOS provided an update on this matter which, in accordance with the procedure for

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<sup>1</sup> FCCC/SBSTA/2010/13, paragraph 47.

<sup>2</sup> FCCC/SBSTA/2010/13, paragraphs 48–50.

<sup>3</sup> FCCC/SBSTA/2011/2, paragraph 56.

**FCCC/SBSTA/2011/MISC.14**

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Letter dated 2 November 2011 from the secretariat of the Global Terrestrial Observing System to the Coordinator of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice

I am writing to update you about the status of the development of the proposals for a “Framework for climate related terrestrial observations” and the “Work Plan on the development of standards and protocols for the terrestrial Essential Climate Variables (ECVs)” that the Global Terrestrial Observing System programme (GTOS) submitted at the thirty-third session of the SBSTA, under the agenda item 5 - Research and Systematic Observation.

In its conclusions, the SBSTA 33 “encouraged the GTOS to continue coordinating the development of methodologies for climate-related terrestrial observations and to continue working with its sponsors and the International Organization for Standardization, and in broad consultation with relevant partners, towards implementation of that workplan, including through mobilization of the necessary resources”.

In this regard, the SBSTA “invited the GTOS to report at the thirty-fifth session of the SBSTA on progress made” on the matters referred above.

The thirty-fourth session of the SBSTA, however, agreed to defer its consideration of matters related to systematic observation to its thirty-sixth session.

In view of the above conclusion by the SBSTA, the Secretariat of the GTOS has planned to submit the report invited by the thirty-third session of the SBSTA to its thirty-sixth session, instead of thirty-fifth, when the SBSTA is expected to consider matters related to systematic observation in line with its conclusions of the thirty-fourth session.

In the meanwhile the GTOS Secretariat is pleased to provide an update on the progress made up to date, as follows.

Subsequent to consultations within GTOS and the Global Climate Observing System (GCOS) a refinement of the framework and the work plan submitted to SBSTA 33 was initiated at the beginning of 2011. Both the proposed framework and work plan were discussed in particular at i) the thirteenth Session of the Terrestrial Observation Panel for Climate (TOPC), held in Geneva, 10-11 March 2011, and at ii) the twenty-first Session of the GCOS Steering Committee, held in Reading, UK, 20-23 September 2011.

The main outcome of the above consultation is that broader consensus would be required to define the best standardisation option (including consideration of best practices, ISO standards and possibly different approach for standardization per ECV) and the proposed prioritization of the ECVs. Therefore the widest possible community should be involved in reviewing the framework and work plan proposed.

Taking into account these considerations, the Secretariat of the GTOS is proposing to proceed as follow:

- To open the proposed framework to a broader peer reviewed process (including UN organizations, International Organization for Standardization, scientific community outside the GTOS and GCOS membership, operational services, monitoring networks, etc.). This review should be completed by March 2012.
- To provide information to the reviewers on the rationale and benefits of a standardization process for ECVs.
- To produce revised versions of both the framework and the work plan. Those versions may include different approaches for standardization per ECV.
- To start mobilization of the necessary resources and the potential preparation of the Memorandum of Understanding between the relevant parties.

A detailed report on progress made on the development of the framework and the work plan will be submitted to the thirty-sixth session of the SBSTA.

Should further information regarding the above matters be required, please do not hesitate to contact me or Mr Antonio Bombelli ([antonio.bombelli@fao.org](mailto:antonio.bombelli@fao.org)).

We look forward to continued cooperation with UNFCCC in the coming years.

(Signed) John S. Latham  
GTOS Programme Director

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