

Cartagena, Colombia
22 May 2001

**5th Global Spatial Data Infrastructure
Intervention of Santiago Borrero, Chair Organizing Committee,
at the Opening Session**

Ladies and gentleman:

Welcome to Colombia,
Welcome to Cartagena

In 1996 at the city of Bonn in Germany the first GSDI conference took place, giving origin to the initiative that, for the fifth time is reuniting this community: the Global Spatial Data Infrastructure. Since then, Chapel Hill in the United States, Canberra the capital city of Australia and Cape Town in South Africa hosted subsequent conferences to advance the GSDI vision.

Many and very important persons have contributed to GSDI development and, for several reasons, some of them are not here like Jane Paterson, David Rhind or Mike Brand. In particular, I like to recall the name of Jack Estes, very recently passing away. Jack was a very active member of the GSDI Steering Committee, since its origins, and Chair of the International Steering Committee for Global Mapping. These meetings in Cartagena were in his agenda, just days ago. Global Mapping has now Peter Holland as interim Chair and Yoshihisa Hoshino, GSI Deputy Director General, on his behalf will be presenting his paper.

Ever since that first event, the main conference theme has impacted the direction and pace at which GSDI is advancing. On this occasion, almost approaching the follow-up to Agenda 21, named Rio+10, to take place in South Africa during Summer, 2002 we are convince that when choosing the main theme for this fifth conference, we did correctly by focusing on the relation between the need for a GSDI and decision- making in the context of sustainable development.

65 programmed interventions and papers. This number should be sufficient to look at this central theme from the main perspectives and to contribute with ideas to build, as it is traditional in GSDI, conference resolutions, impacting the work of the Steering Committee.

GSDI is an initiative that goes beyond recent changes in the telecommunications infrastructure and information technologies. GSDI must fundamental for advancing the “knowledge society”, by providing spatial data to all those in need at local, national, regional and global levels. As John Moeller simply put, “... the purpose of GSDI is to encourage the growth of compatible Spatial Data

Infrastructures that are capable of supporting collaboration on regional and global issues of importance.”

In this context, one of the expected results of the conference, leads to identify relevant elements requesting attention to optimize the existent relationship between spatial information and Agenda 21, in such a way that at RIO+10 policy be adopted, allowing GSDI to provide a much needed global framework, from SDI development at all levels.

After five years of existence, GSDI must enter a period in which its benefits are more practical and specific. To support effectively policy and project formulation, decision-making, planning processes, disaster prevention and mitigation should be at the core of GSDI priorities.

Setting these necessities is just a way to show the existence of a path for GSDI immediate future, given the fact that GSDI results are already noteworthy:

- GSDI has contributed to development and strategic orientation for SDI at the regional level. As well GSDI insist in promoting a similar approach to every region in the world. On this, Liz Gavin will report on Africa and Mosaad Ibrahim, Director General of Egypt’s Mapping Agency on its region.
- GSDI is stimulating development of spatially based supporting systems for planning (PSS), decision-making (DSS) and disaster attention (DIN)
- GSDI is inducing nations to develop SDI. Actually, at various stages, there are 45 identified initiatives.
- By promoting interoperability, at all levels, GSDI contributes to achieve Agenda 21.
- GSDI is impacting the way by which geographic information is produced. Global standards for metadata, quality and terminology, are sound examples.

SDI development at regional and national levels should reflect local cultural, economic and social values. In Colombia, for instance, the “Environmental Alliance” an initiative of the Minister of Environment, Mr. Juan Mayr, became the element facilitating basic agreements, leading to the formation of the Colombian Spatial Data Infrastructure. More recently, adoption of the "National Connectivity Agenda”, conceived by the Presidency to promote the use of the Internet, is opening a new opportunity to advance the Colombian geo spatial content available in the Web and to formulate policy pertaining geographic information.

Our own experience is probing once more that in developing world, whatever its definition, NSDI to advance, requires a minimum balance between data production and development of other infrastructure components. More importantly it depends on “sustainability” expressed in terms of finance,

administration, technology and capacity building. Otherwise, the opposite, leads to widen the knowledge gap and, in times of the information society, to greater isolation for people, institutions, communities or nations.

These are some of the GSDI 5 challenges facing 300 delegates representing 49 nationalities and all regions from world, as well as industry, academia, international geographic associations, governments and multilateral organizations.

On behalf of the GSDI 5 Organizing Committee and all of us at the Agustin Codazzi Geographic Institute of Colombia I wish you all success in meeting the conference goals in the context of “Sustainable Development: GSDI for improved decision making”.