



# GRID-Geneva Quarterly Bulletin No. 4

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## Global Resource Information Database-Geneva

### UNEP Divisional Programme and Strategy Meeting

GRID's parent Division of Environmental Information, Assessment and Early Warning (DEIA&EW) held its long-awaited strategy and work programming meeting at UNEP Headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya and which included a retreat to the Aberderes Country Club from 1-5 November 1999. The meeting brought together the Division's staff of over 30 professionals for the first time since recent restructuring within UNEP, to finalise the Divisional strategy and prepare a costed programme of work for the 2000-2001 biennium.

Using the standard logical framework approach, the meeting developed an integrated programme of activities based on the Division's biennial budget of \$24 million. Synergies with the newly finalised Earth Observing and Assessment Strategy (EOAS) were also examined, and helped to focus discussions on the essential components and deliverables for 2000-2001.



The Divisional meeting held in Nairobi in November 1999 brought together staff from headquarters and the regions to develop a more integrated global programme.

One of the most valuable aspects of the one-week exercise was the opportunity it afforded Divisional staff to get to know one another and be updated with latest developments. For new colleagues who were formerly part of UNEP sectoral assessment units, it was a chance to meet staff from the regions and identify linkages with regional activities. For all of those involved the meeting provided both a Divisional "overview" and the first opportunity to move towards true integration of DEIA&EW in its entirety.

As the Division gears up to full strength in 2000, the programme of work developed during this meeting and fine-tuned in subsequent follow-up discussions, should significantly streamline performance and provide a clear focus for DEIA&EW's priority outputs. ■

Ron Witt,  
Regional Coordinator

The BTF report can be downloaded from GRID-Geneva's website at: <http://www.grid.unep.ch/btf>



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### Balkans Task Force Releases Final Report

UNEP's Executive Director Dr. Klaus Töpfer and the Joint UNEP/UNCHS (Habitat) Balkans Task Force (BTF) Chairman Mr. P. Haavisto, officially launched a report describing the results and overall conclusions of BTF field missions at a press conference held in Stockholm, Sweden on 14 October 1999. The report entitled *The Kosovo Conflict - Consequences for the Environment and Human Settlements*, concludes that military operations have not led to a regional environmental disaster in the Balkans. In specific localities, however, chemical contamination is serious and poses a significant risk to human health. Four environmental "hot spots" have been

identified; namely the industrial sites of Pancevo, Kragujevac, Novi Sad and Bor, all in Serbia. The report calls for immediate clean-up action, which it argues should constitute an integral part of the overall humanitarian assistance being provided to the war-torn region.

The BTF report, which has been translated into Albanian, Serbian and French, says that much of the pollution identified actually pre-dates the conflict's outbreak and that there is widespread evidence of long-term deficiencies in the treatment of hazardous waste.

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## Supporting Emergency Response to the Turkey Earthquake

On 17 August 1999, the world awoke to news that a devastating earthquake had struck in Turkey. The earthquake's epicentre was near the city of Izmit and measured 7.4 on the Richter scale. According to estimates by the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), over 17,000 people died and some 44,000 people were injured. The region's infrastructure was equally devastated; approximately 300,000 homes and 40,000 business premises collapsed or were severely damaged. A

second earthquake reaching 7.2 on the Richter scale struck 150 km east of Istanbul on 12 November 1999. IFRC placed the human toll from this quake at 794 dead and 4,974 injured.

Furthermore, some 900 homes collapsed and more than 1,608 buildings are due for demolition.



The highly active North Anatolian fault follows a right lateral movement of 24-4mm/year.

In responding to this major crisis and its associated environmental impacts, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

called on GRID-Geneva and the Space Applications Institute of the EU's Joint Research Centre for technical support. An information package, which included satellite based impact assessments as well as maps, was prepared to support OCHA's field mission to Turkey. The North Anatolian fault is very active and it is difficult to predict with certainty the next earthquake event. For more information on the seismology of the Turkey earthquake, consult the U.S. Geological Survey website at: <http://ghmaps01.cr.usgs.gov/turkey/turkey.html> ■

## Global Environment Outlook (GEO)-3 Process Initiated

No sooner had UNEP successfully launched its Global Environmental Outlook (GEO) 2000, than preparations were underway to initiate the "GEO-3" process during a week-long meeting held in Nairobi from 15-19 November. The GEO-3 'Start-up' Meeting was attended by UNEP staff, representatives of around 30 GEO Collaborating Centres as well as other key participants and advisors, to examine lessons learned from previous work and plan for the next two years of GEO-related activities.

The meeting's extensive agenda included both group presentations and

discussions, and numerous smaller working group sessions to address in more detail issues such as: perspectives on the GEO process; a Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats (SWOT) analysis; inputs on a proposed Scope and Outline for GEO-3; and priority issues of regional groupings.

UNEP's Executive Director Dr. K. Töpfer provided his views on what GEO-3 ought to encompass in a lengthy give-and-take session with participants. Other presentations featured the launch of GEO 2000 and

associated products including "Pachamama" or GEO-for-Youth, a training manual on Integrated Environmental Assessments and SIDS Environment Outlooks.

The timeline for the preparation of GEO-3 is very tight and the year 2000 will see a succession of meetings and other activities to move the process rapidly forward. Already, a series of "small working groups" have been formed to cover issues such as data and illustrations, policy, scenarios, global synthesis, capacity building, and communications and marketing. An important

decision was made during the 'Start-up' Meeting to turn GEO from a project into a self-standing programme, which implies greater and broader resources and longer-term stability. Plans are therefore underway to lay the groundwork for GEO-3, and also bring about the institutionalisation of the GEO process. The spirit of co-operation and professionalism shown by participants during the meeting has guaranteed an excellent start to the GEO-3 process. ■

## BTF Report Released

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GRID-Geneva hosted the BTF's Information Unit and was closely involved in the report's preparation, including provision of cartographic support and analysis of satellite imagery. The Information Unit also developed and maintained an extensive website, and produced regular electronic bulletins on the conflict's

impacts and BTF activities.

On 17 November, the BTF in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme called for donor support of environmental priority emergency projects, estimated at U.S. \$17 million, as part of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' consolidated UN inter-agency Appeal 2000. The

proposed emergency projects are aimed at preventing further environmental degradation in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) in order to control the serious threat to human health from the four aforementioned industrial sites considered to be environmental "hot spots". These emergency projects will be closely co-ordinated with donor countries, relevant UN

agencies and NGOs.

In a "concluding seminar" with partners and international experts held on 26 November in Geneva, the BTF announced that it is initiating a fund-raising campaign for monitoring of the proposed emergency projects, and which should be completed towards the end of 2000. ■

## Implementation Phase of Alpine-CDS Completed

In January 1999, the Swiss Agency for Environment, Forests and Landscape (BUWAL) commissioned GRID-Geneva in collaboration with the System for Observation and Information of the Alps (SOIA) to develop a meta-database for the Alpine region. The meta-database, known as the Alpine-CDS, will be an important tool for planning and co-ordinating environmental projects in the Alps.

The Alpine-CDS has now been successfully completed and handed over to the SOIA in December 1999. Developed using the European Environment Agency's WinCDS technology, the database is now populated with 1230 addresses of persons and institutions handling data on the Alps and 1270 meta-data entries (including information about maps, datasets, projects, documents, tools).

Meta-data have been provided by international organisations, NGOs, Swiss authorities and Swiss academic and research centres. Next steps should include populating the database with meta-data from other Alpine Convention countries. The placement of the database on the Web is currently underway at SOIA and should be accessible on the Internet in early 2000.

Three different tools have been developed to enhance the Alpine and Swiss CDS:

- Printing tool, allowing customised selection of objects/addresses and preparation of several report layouts;
- Importation/merging tool, for importation and compilation of several CDS files as well as data conversion from CDS 2.0



to CDS 2.5; and,

- Validation tool, for manual tracking of related meta-data.

These tools will be continually fine-tuned to accommodate emerging needs. In view of the Y2K Millennium bug, conversion from MS-Access 2.0 to MS-Access 97 was considered a critical issue. In response, adaptation and conversion to the new WinCDS 2.5 format has been initiated. ■



An MS-Access tool has been developed to validate metadata for the Alpine-CDS.

## Climate Indicators Project

SAEFL commissioned GRID-Geneva in collaboration with SOIA to establish a climate monitoring system for the Alpine region. The objective of the climate indicator project is to identify a core group of climate change indicators used by all Alpine Convention countries. Following research and consultations with Alpine Convention climate experts, an overall list of climate change indicators was compiled from which it

was possible to identify data that are commonly available in all Alpine Convention countries. A list and description of the selected indicators has been finalised and a final report is due to be published by January 2000. A database using WinCDS 2.5 technology has also been developed to store and handle climate change indicators, as well as other environmental indicators for the Alpine region. ■



The Climate Change Indicators Database was developed using WinCDS 2.5 technology.

## Pan-European Governmental Meeting on Monitoring Systems

One of the outcomes of the June 1998 European Ministerial Meeting on Environment in Aarhus, Denmark, was a proposal by the Russian Federation to convene a pan-European meeting to examine the status of environmental monitoring systems in the region. Pursuant to this goal, the Russian State Committee for

Environmental Protection (SCEP) hosted a meeting on the "Development of Environmental Monitoring Systems in the European Region" in Moscow on 8-9 December 1999. Nearly 30 European governments took part, as well as the European Commission (DG-XI Environment), the European Environment Agency, and

several UN and non-European national agencies from the USA and Japan. Ron Witt participated on behalf of UNEP and DEIA&EW.

The meeting examined the status of environmental monitoring methods and systems in the European Union, the Commonwealth of Independent States, and

Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries. While some of the methodological difficulties faced cut-across the pan-European region, CEE countries stressed that they often had to deal with more basic problems. These included inadequate human and financial resources, absence of policies supporting

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International Environment House (IEH) , 11 Chemin des  
Anémones, 1219 Châtelaine, Geneva, Switzerland  
1st Floor, 'A' Block

Tel.: (+41-22) 917-8294/5  
Fax: (+41-22) 917-8029  
Email: services@grid.unep.ch

Visit the GRID-Geneva website at:  
<http://www.grid.unep.ch/>

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### Pan-European Meeting

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"free and open access" to environmental information, and lack of data standards. Some participants emphasised the wealth of environmental data collected globally, often from space-based systems, while others noted the difficulty of identifying precise indicators that can offer a reliable overview of environmental status and trends. Another danger expressed was that of developing enormous archives of data, which could turn into "data cemeteries". In short, environmental data collection should be user-driven and respond to the information needs of decision-makers and the public, and not "data for data's sake".

One of the major results of the meeting was to establish a process of consultation on monitoring systems, by issuing a Declaration for an "Ad-hoc Working Group on Environment Monitoring Systems" to be set up as an adjunct to the UN-ECE's Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP). If approved, the Ad-hoc Working Group would feed its outputs into the "Environment for Europe" process overseen by the CEP, and the next European Ministerial Conference to be held in Kiev in September 2001. Given the importance of data collection and monitoring to UNEP's environmental assessments, it intends to closely follow the work of the Ad-hoc Working Group. ■

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### Calendar of Events, Meetings & Missions Planned (January – March 2000)

20-21 January

Coordinating Meeting on Tourism, UNEP/TIE, Paris, France.

24-28 January

Establishing an Information System for Environmental Monitoring, Plan Bleu, Sophia-Antipolis, France.

31 January-3 February

GEO-3 Internal Coordination Meeting, UNEP, Nairobi, Kenya.

29 January-5 February

National Training Workshop on GISWeb-Africa, OSS/UNITAR/GRID-Geneva, Dakar, Senegal.

2-4 February

Inter-Agency Meeting on Outer Space Affairs, UN-OOSA, Vienna, Austria.

17-22 March

## GRID-Geneva Advisory Board Meeting

The biannual meeting of the GRID-Geneva Partnership Advisory Board (AB) was hosted by the University of Geneva at Villa Rigot on 10 November 1999. AB members took stock of project activities carried-out and outputs produced by GRID-Geneva over this year. The meeting also reviewed the staffing and budget situations, expressing its overall satisfaction with the healthy standing and steady growth realised by GRID-Geneva in this respect. An important outcome of the meeting was the unanimous approval of GRID-Geneva's mid-term strategy document, now formally known as the "2000-2003 Strategic Directions for the DEIA&EW/GRID-Geneva Office".

The Regional Co-ordinator presented a detailed post-evaluation of GRID-Geneva's participation in the activities of the Balkans Task Force (BTF). Two main conclusions were drawn in this respect, namely that the office gained

significant internal (within UNEP) and external recognition from its involvement in the BTF, and that it acquired valuable experience in environmental reporting during conflict situations. On behalf of Mr. Philippe Roch, the BUWAL representative Ms. Monica Linn Locher congratulated UNEP for its excellent work and the timely and highly informative BTF report.

The meeting was also briefed about several new project activities that GRID-Geneva was preparing in collaboration with other partners for 2000, including its involvement in the Global Environment Outlook reporting process and establishing an environmental data and information management network for the Caspian Sea Region.

The next Advisory Board meeting will be hosted by BUWAL in Bern on 12 April 1999. ■

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## Recent Publications and Other Products

### New Publications

- ◆ *The Kosovo Conflict - Consequences for the Environment and Human Settlements* (published by the Joint UNEP/UNCHS (Habitat) Balkans Task Force). The report is also available in Albanian, French, and Serbian. Plus an information brochure on BTF findings available in the aforementioned languages as well as German and Russian.
- ◆ An article in the German magazine "Fokus" (25 October) gave extensive coverage to the activities of BTF and related GRID-Geneva satellite imagery analysis.

### Maps and Posters

- ◆ Colour Shaded Relief Map of The Balkans Region
- ◆ European Nuclear Power Sites
- ◆ Major Earthquakes in Turkey
- ◆ Software of reference sources and analysis of environmental information in Africa (poster for Basel Convention)