

Welcome statement
Fifteen years of UNOSAT operations

11 October 2016 at 2PM, Palais des Nations Room XI

Nikhil Seth, UN Assistant Secretary-General and UNITAR Executive Director

Excellencies, Dear partners, Friends and Colleagues,

Today marks the fifteenth anniversary of our UNOSAT programme, which celebrates fifteen years of operational support to Member States, UN sister agencies, international and regional organizations and NGOs. UNOSAT has become a programme which supports and strengthens the three interrelated pillars of the UN's work – peace and security, human rights and sustainable development.

What started out as a small project financed by the European Space Agency (ESA) and the French Space Agency (CNES) in collaboration with what was at-the-time 'SPOT Image', quickly transformed into a fully-fledged programme focusing on applications of satellite imagery for humanitarian and development needs.

The demands on UNOSAT soon evolved to include capacity development, and today UNOSAT has capacity development initiatives at the heart of its programming, running not only from Geneva, but also from N'Djamena in Chad, Nairobi and Bangkok. We build capacities in satellite imagery analysis to strengthen the evidence based decision making in so many areas. This is an invaluable tool in so many spheres of human endeavors.

Over recent years, activities have expanded into the fields of human security and human rights, for example for the protection of civilians to plan and monitor construction of refugee camps, for locating internally displaced persons and for assessing damage to civilian sites during conflict situations. UNOSAT has done seminal work in damage assessment of the cultural heritage of humankind both in Syria and Iraq.

UNOSAT has the excellent advantage of being hosted at CERN. I wanted to take this opportunity to highlight and express my appreciation for the hard work and dedication of the young team of ladies and gentlemen, whose inspiring work on a daily basis, has made the success of UNOSAT possible. Their work is truly

remarkable and it is thanks to them that we are celebrating today. I would like to thank CERN too as a steadfast and reliable partner, as a warm and generous host to our office. Our cooperation has been exemplary.

Partnerships have been at the core of UNOSAT's strategic development since the beginning. We are a small Institute and rely on strong partnerships for maximizing the impact of what we do. UNOSAT works with a wide range of partners, of which may have participated in this morning's session. In addition, being based here in Geneva adds huge value to the strengthening of our partnerships with the humanitarian community, as well as with the bustling research and innovation communities in this city. UNOSAT has partnered with the University of Geneva and has benefited hugely from its truly innovative research.

As many of you know already, the new 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals are dear to me. I was deeply involved in the process that led to the adoption of the SDGs and now am committed to supporting Member States in their implementation of the Goals in specific national contexts. I am convinced that satellite applications have a pivotal role to play in monitoring various indicators related to specific targets and will be hugely instrumental as we move forward in delivering on the Agenda as a whole. Apart from providing the evidence for sensible policy, satellite imagery can help in finding, through spatial analysis, integrated solutions to our world's intractable problems.

Towards the end of the afternoon there will be a short panel discussion where we will hear from representatives from humanitarian actors, the development community and the private sector, to share their views on how satellite imagery may contribute to our achievement of the Goals of the 2030 Agenda, whilst upholding the principles of 'reaching the furthest first' and 'leaving no one behind'. You will later also have a chance to hear directly from our beneficiaries, about the impact of the work of UNOSAT.

I thank you for your attention, and congratulate the UNOSAT team once again for an impressive job. I wish the programme all the possible success for the future. I would especially like to appreciate the tremendous work done by the Programme Manager, Einar Bjorgo, and compliment him on his dedication.

Before we embark on the success stories though, I wanted to share with you a short video from the Secretary-General of the United Nations – enjoy!

(SG VIDEO GREETING DISPLAYED ON VIDEO SCREEN)