

**SDI Convergence:
Building Bridges in Support of Local to Global Challenges**
Bas Kok, President, GSDI Association

(Still image of earth seen from space as backdrop)

Good morning. I'm Bas Kok, current president of GSDI and I take great pleasure in welcoming you to Rotterdam and to this 11th GSDI world conference.

This image of the earth as seen by astronauts is one which is burned into the consciousness of human beings all over the world. From space, our planet appears as a single world, a single organism. And from the perspective of the universe, our world *is* one whole.

Down here on the surface of the earth where we all live, we know that our planet has many parts, many divisions - physical, environmental, economic, and political. Yet we are gradually realizing that the image of our planet as a single whole is becoming more true every day in almost every way.

The man-made boundaries of political borders are not respected by increasing global climate change and the resultant weather disruptions around the world; nor by pandemics; nor even by economic forces in a global economy.

It is no secret to any of us that to deal with these and other trans-national challenges, we humans are going to have to cooperate more intensely and more effectively for the benefit of all of us who inhabit this planet.

That is precisely why the theme of this conference is **Spatial Data Infrastructure Convergence: Building SDI Bridges to Address Global Challenges**.

There are two ideas in this theme. They were chosen very carefully.

The first is **Spatial Data Infrastructure Convergence: Building SDI Bridges**. That tells us what we aspire to do.

The second is **to Address Global Challenges**. That reminds us why we seek to Build SDI bridges.

It is not for the sake of bridge building *per se*.

It is not for the sake of meeting interesting scientific or engineering challenges, although that is certainly an important accomplishment.

No, we hope to focus in this conference on investigating and sharing how we can apply our expertise to build bridges across disciplines and borders and other types of boundaries to make life better on this planet we all share.

Over the next few days, through keynotes and sessions, we will have an opportunity to look at some of the successes that have occurred around the world in building spatial data infrastructures that are already improving life for earth's inhabitants in many different ways.

I could spend the rest of the morning listing such successes on every continent in the world. Instead, I encourage you to attend as many sessions here as you can to learn about these exciting successes for yourself.

Successes, of course, are not the whole story - there is much left to be done, so we will also have an opportunity to investigate the nature of some of the challenges remaining to enable even more SDI convergence for the benefit of us all.

How can we, for example, best build SDI bridges to take advantage of the information available through the proliferation of GPS equipped cell phones and other portable devices worldwide?

How can we use the information available from widely deployed sensors or fed into the "cloud" to better respond to natural disasters or global health threats?

These days, average people not only want access to information generated by their governments and the businesses they trade with, they also want to generate information themselves on a voluntary basis. Where are the opportunities to improve our ecology or commerce, or to reduce the level of poverty in the world contained in the huge amount of information individuals voluntarily offer for sharing via the Internet?

These are all areas in which we know from experience that no company or even government acting alone can make much progress with. Yet all of us in this room understand that every company and every government has its own individual vision of how things should be done.

We need only look back at the history of the development of railroads in the 19th century to remind ourselves of how inefficient that kind of fragmentation can be. In many cases, when railroad cars arrived at national borders, the cargo had to be off-loaded from cars built to operate on one track width and re-loaded on cars built to operate on another. And, as we know, it was only in the 19th century that the world agreed, for the first time in history, on a common way to describe time.

Today, our planet needs to act more and more as a whole for the good of all of its inhabitants.

We in the spatial data community can help that to happen. We can encourage bridge building, design commonly accepted and shared infrastructures for spatial

data, imagine and build better ways to share information that can be used to address and solve problems from the local to the global level.

Specifically, we can implement the initiatives in our GSDI Strategic Plan. I won't go over the whole plan now - it's available on our web site - but I would like to highlight some key items that I think will help us to build those bridges and put spatial data to use in solving some of the pressing problems that face us all on this planet.

For example, we regularly offer conferences such as this one to enhance communications among practitioners as well as among the leadership of other geospatial organizations. We purposefully take our conferences to different parts of the globe in order to serve all parts of the planet.

We publish monthly newsletters within and for various regions of the globe in multiple languages in order to keep all geospatial specialists aware of opportunities to become engaged and participate in their own regions. We offer a regular small grants program in furtherance of SDI development in developing nations.

We are expanding support of our working committees that are actively addressing technical, legal and socioeconomic, social impact, and communication issues. I highly encourage you to attend the open round table sessions of these committees in the days ahead to get involved in any way you can in helping to move our affiliated professions forward in addressing real world problems.

The planet has too many problems and there is too much work for any of our organizations or for any of us as individuals to sit on our hands. Get involved!

Welcome to Rotterdam. Welcome to GSDI 11. Explore, investigate, share, learn, imagine.

And if, for a moment, you forget why we are here, just take a look once again at this image. That is the answer.

Thank you.