

THE AFRICAN ASSOCIATION OF REMOTE SENSING OF THE ENVIRONMENT (AARSE)



The 6th AARSE Conference

The 6th biennial conference of the African Association of the Environment (AARSE) took place in Cairo, Egypt from October 30 to November 2, 2006 and was hosted by the Egyptian National Authority for Remote Sensing and Space Sciences (NARSS). The main theme of the conference “Earth Observation and Geo-information sciences in support of Africa’s development” was held at the Semiramis Intercontinental Hotel, Cairo. It was co-sponsored by: the Canadian Space Agency (CSA-ASC), EIS-Africa (partner organization of AARSE), European Space Agency (ESA), IEEE, ISPRS, ITC, NASA, NUFFIC, UNESCO, and UNOOSA.

The conference attracted over 400 registrants representing 38 countries. Around 112 registered and paid participants from Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire, DRC, Eritrea, Malawi, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Uganda reported they could not get visa from the Egyptian Embassies in their countries (or neighbouring countries) despite every effort done by NARSS to send all necessary documents to the applicants in time. The conference featured over 160 presentations and 60 posters in 3 plenary sessions, 31 technical sessions, 5 poster sessions, 2 workshops (a half a day pre and a 2 weeks post workshop), 3 meetings (AARSE Council, AARSE General Assembly, EIS Africa, University Network for Disaster Risk Reduction in Africa – UNEDRA special session), 3 round tables and many business meetings. Total numbers of exhibitors were 18 with 6 presentations. Exhibitors include: AARSE, Airborne Laser Solutions (South Africa); Cairo Engineering & Manufacturing Co; Canadian Space Agency (CSA-ASC); ERSDAC - Japan; Global Geobits-Egypt; Global Scan Technologies LLC (GST - Dubai based); EIS-Africa; International Institute for Geoinformation Science & Earth Observation (ITC), The Netherlands; Information Technology Institute (ITI) – Egypt; MAPS Geosystems, UAE; MDA; NASA, USA; NARSS, Egypt; Optech, Egypt; PCI Geomatics, South Africa and Quality Standards Information Technology (QSIT – Egypt). The conference was opened by Dr. Ayman El-Dessouki, Chairman of NARSS on behalf of HIS Excellency Prof. Hany Helal, the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research.

The organization and logistic part of the conference was very good. The LOC has devoted a great deal of thought, time and energy in its planning, not only in deciding on the excellent facilities, the technical program and the scientific exhibit, but also in the social activities. In spite of the long daily duration of the sessions (up to 6:30 p.m. sometimes), the attendance was reasonable and constant till the end with oral presentation short, focused and discussions afterwards lively. The abstract papers were distributed in a book form while the full papers were handed in CD-Rom. All were distributed during the conference. The technical programs were accompanied by visit to various exhibition stands. The social events (e.g., Nile Cruise, ITC alumni party, CAS special invitation for a cocktail party at the Canadian Embassy, etc.), allowed a better social interaction and fruitful discussions.

The AARSE Award of Merit this year went to Prof. Peter Adeniyi, founding president of AARSE (1992-2004) for his meritorious services to the Association and to the International Institute for Geoinformation Sciences and Earth Observation (ITC) for its unflinching support to Capacity Building in Africa. The award, a plaque and commemorative award were handed over to Dr. Jide Kufoniyi (on behalf of Prof. Adeniyi) and to Sjaak Beerens (on behalf

of ITC) by Prof. Dr. Ayman El-Dessouki, Chairman of NARSS during the opening ceremony. Nominations to both awards was made by African national organizations and individuals which was subsequently approved by the Executive Council of AARSE after going through a number of deliberation as is required by the constitution.

For the first time, AARSE conference witnessed the presentation of joint AARSE and ESA (European Space Agency) award for the best oral, poster presentation and the best student contribution. Oral evaluation criteria were based upon: innovative content of paper, time keeping, clarity of presentation and articulate response to questions. Selection was made by: Session chairpersons + 3 randomly selected session participants and the three Awarding Committee members. Best Poster and Student contribution evaluation criteria were based upon: innovative content, quality of visualisation and attractive design. The selection was done by the Award Committee comprising of: Prof. Harold Annegarn, University of Johannesburg (Chairman), Dr. Diego Fernandez (ESA), Prof. Sayed Araft (NARSS, Egypt) and Dr. Peter Zeil (University of Salzburg, Austria). 7 AARSE-ESA Award were made.

AARSE General Assembly (GA) 11/1/2006 16:00-17:30

At the AARSE General Assembly:

- Prof. Sayed Arafat was confirmed as the new Vice-President for Northern Africa.
- Mr. Sjaak Beerens (on behalf of ITC) will sit in the Board of Trustees of AARSE, together with T. Woldai, P. Zeil, J. Ahahanzo (UNESCO), Peter Adeniyi, Evelyn Mbede and O. Kufoniyi.
- Ghana was put forward by AARSE EC as the next host of the 7th AARSE Conference in Accra, early October 2008. It is to be organized by CERSGIS of the University of Ghana in collaboration with other Universities, government ministries and private sector. Dr. E. Amamoo-Otchere, the Executive Director of CERSGIS was approved to be the Conference President (2006-2008).

AARSE and ISPRS

The President of ISPRS, Prof Ian Dowman expressed his appreciation for the strong collaboration between ISPRS and AARSE (a regional member of ISPRS), which was further demonstrated at the 6th conference through the joint ISPRS/GEO/AARSE sessions on Capacity building as well as the ISPRS/AARSE sessions on Data Fusion and Innovative Problem Solving Methodologies in Less Developed Countries. He expressed the hope that this collaboration will intensify in future. The ISPRS was represented at the conference by Prof Dowman (President) and Prof Manos Bastvasia (Vice-President)

6th AARSE Conference Closing Ceremony 02.11.2006

EC, through its President thanked the Government of Egypt, Prof. Ayman El-Dessouki, Chairman of NARSS, the Local Organizing Committee, and all funding and supporting organizations described above for making the conference a success. Special word of thanks went to ITC/NUFFIC for fully funding the post-conference 2-weeks workshop in Cairo and subsequently funding many participants to attend the conference. The moral and continuous support that 6th AARSE Conference enjoyed from the ISPRS President, ISPRS Commissions and from IEEE was also highly applauded. ESA (grant for the Award) and UNESCO and UNOOSA for funding African researchers participate to the conference were also appreciated. The deliberation by the AARSE President was immediately followed by the AARSE-ESA award and the citation of the Cairo AARSE Declaration (see below) including a call to everyone to attend the next AFRICA GIS conference in Ouagadougou and the 7th AARSE Conference in Accra, Ghana in October 2008.

The Chairman of NARSS, Prof. Ayman El-Dessouki in his closing ceremony thanked AARSE, ISPRS, exhibitors, co-sponsors of the conference, LOC and IOC. He promised to send the declaration through HIS Excellency Prof. Hany Helal, the Hon Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Egypt to the African Union, UN-ECA and the NEPAD Secretariat in Egypt. With the vote of thanks, Prof. Ayman El-Dessouki awarded a commemorative NARSS present to the AARSE and ISPRS Presidents and declared the 2006 AARSE 7th Conference closed.

Action:

The conference communiqué was released and sent with covering letter jointly signed by AARSE President and NARSS Chairman to the Hon Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Egypt and The Honourable Minister of Infrastructure, Egypt for endorsement.

Subsequently, AARSE has already released the declaration and sent to the:

1. UN Economic Commission for Africa
2. NEPAD
3. UNESCO
4. African Union
5. African Development Bank
6. GEO Secretariat
7. ISPRS
8. ESA
9. NASA
10. Canadian Space Agency
11. ICA
12. African Government through AARSE National Point of Contact.