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President of the Republic of Colombia 1998-2002

**MESSAGE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC DOCTOR ANDRÉS
PASTRANA ARANGO, ON THE OCCASION OF THE 5TH GLOBAL SPATIAL
DATA INFRASTRUCTURE CONFERENCE**

Cartagena, Colombia - May 22, 2001

Today, Man can hold the world in his hands. A mere click on the screen provides access to all the information that he could want through a display that practically turns into a mirror that reflects the globalized world in which he lives. Nevertheless, there is a disconnect between the virtual world and the real world. While in the virtual world, information grows by giant leaps and bounds, in the real world, the natural resources that constitute the raw material for our lives are slowly disappearing.

Man currently faces the challenge of implementing a sustainable development plan that will help him maintain the natural order of the world, so that we may continue to benefit from its great wealth. Thus, the screen made mirror contributes to this noble cause, minutely and precisely describing the geography of nations, so that through the use these of these technologies and the virtual world, Man may know precisely his world and learn to better care for it.

Essentially, this is the task which brings you to the historic city of Cartagena de Indias, acting responsibly toward our planet and reflecting your commitment to future generations. Because of the importance of spatial data for sustainable development, economic growth, and democracy, it is an honor for Colombia to have been chosen to host this conference. Unfortunately, official duties prevent me from being with you on this occasion, as would be my wish. However, I must take advantage of this opportunity to indicate how important I consider the adaptation of Information Technologies and to possessing ever more high quality information that better describes the complex geography of Colombia.

In this context, there is no doubt that the Colombian Spatial Data Infrastructure, coordinated by the Instituto Geográfico Agustín Codazzi has made it a priority goal to significantly increase the national content of information available via Internet. For this reason the Institute has efficiently incorporated into its cartographic production information from a variety of sources, especially satellite imagery. This will benefit all sectors of the government and of society. The magnificent world of information and new technologies should not distance us from reality, but rather reflect that reality and help us work to improve it.

It is important to remember that guaranteeing access by all Colombians, without any discrimination whatsoever, to this type of information also contributes to our quest for peace and the reaffirmation of democracy. It increases the room for citizen participation and education, just as my government has proposed since the beginning of my term.

The information produced in concert with international standards will facilitate the development of powerful national, regional and international databases, which will in turn contribute to a better understanding of natural phenomena, and thus the prevention of natural disasters, and will also help lead to the development of national environmental policies.

I am so very pleased that our country was chosen to host an event where these topics are studied. Colombia and its government takes a great interest and pleasure in coordinating the activities of the GSDI during 2001-2002, through the Instituto Geográfico Agustín Codazzi, an honor which we interpret as recognition of this nation in this important area.

A cordial welcome to all of the delegates to the Conference – to the government representatives, to the visitors from every continent, and to the representatives from so many international organizations. The best of luck in your findings and resolutions.