



## **Opening Address by George Foulkes MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Department for International Development (DFID) to the Cambridge Conference on 19 July 1999.**

It is a really great pleasure for me to welcome you on behalf of Her Majesty's Government here to the United Kingdom and to this important Conference. I can't think of many more beautiful cities to hold a conference in than Cambridge – (except, of course, for Edinburgh!) I gather that an impressive number of delegates, 235 from 72 countries, are participating this year – an increase on the last Conference four years ago. It's certainly more than attended the first Empire Conference of Survey Officers in 1928, when 45 representatives of Survey Departments from Australia to Zanzibar attended to discuss the technical innovations of their day. These included surveying from the air and the use of radio signals to determine longitude.

But national mapping organisations have – like all of us – had to face major changes, both institutional and technological, in recent years. Many government departments have become agencies; air surveys and radio have been overtaken by satellites and the Internet. It is appropriate, therefore, that the theme of the Conference is *National Mapping in Changing Times*.

I would like to thank first the British mapping organisation, Ordnance Survey, for inviting me to make the opening address to the Conference. Ordnance Survey has seen major changes in its relationship with government in recent years. So it is particularly well placed to host this Conference. Can I say also that since, two weeks ago flying by helicopter in Central America when our pilot informed us he didn't know where our destination was and I rediscovered the importance of map reading, that I'm a particularly appropriate minister to welcome you!

National mapping organisations also provide the information which serves as the basis for decisions on land use and management. In these days of the Internet, of genetic engineering, and of quantum physics, it far too easy to overlook the importance of land. But land forms the very basis of wealth. It provides the world's food and, through the world's forests, it serves as its lungs. It is a finite, and in some ways, a declining resource. Land degradation, inappropriate land use, desertification, and uncontrolled deforestation are undermining the value of our land. And population growth and urbanisation have major implications on land use. Factories, houses, and motorways all remove land from food production, just as surely as does desertification.



So, governments and international agencies, many of whom we support of course, must play their part in ensuring that land is managed in a sustainable way. Land management, like so much of our lives, is too important to be left entirely to the free market. Regulation of land use and sustainable management are vital to the livelihoods of future generations. Effective management and regulation depend on reliable information. By the very nature of land as a global and national resource, there must be a close relationship between government and national mapping organisations.

Although Ordnance Survey operates largely on a commercial basis, the British Government finances, and rightly so, those activities that cannot – or should not – be paid for commercially. We finance through the National Interest Mapping Service Agreement and we also finance the National Land Information Service, which links together government datasets on electronic maps – vitally important areas.

Our Government's commitment to land management is, of course, not just confined to the United Kingdom. World leaders at international conferences over the years have set a number of international development targets, the principal one of which is the target of reducing by half the proportion of the World's population living in absolute poverty by 2015. We have now 1.3 billion people around the world living in abject poverty, scraping a living on less than 65 pence a day. The British Government is committed to playing our full part in achieving this target and the longer-term aim of eliminating poverty altogether. The resources, or potential for them, are there and can and should be more equitably distributed if the political will is there – and the political will is certainly there as far as the British Government is concerned.

The livelihoods of poor people in developing countries, particularly in rural areas, are often linked to secure access to land. For this reason my Department, the Department for International Development, has a long-standing, cordial and constructive relationship with OS International, the International division of Ordnance Survey. We work closely together and I want to give you some indication of how.

A major feature in developing countries, as elsewhere, is a movement of the population from the rural areas to towns and cities. But nevertheless about 70% of poor people in developing countries still live in rural areas, so poverty must be reduced in rural – as well as urban – areas if the global target for poverty reduction is to be met.

For landless people are one of the poorest and most vulnerable groups in the developing world. Secure access to, or ownership of, land on a family or individual basis provides other forms of security too. Land provides the site for their house and a means of growing food and a means of generating income. But large numbers of poor people in rural areas in developing countries do not have secure access to individual plots of land. They are dependent for their livelihoods on common property such as forests or communal grazing land. Even those who are lucky enough to have individual rights to a plot of land may also depend on these communal areas for access to forest products or for grazing land. So land tenure reform leading to individual ownership of these communal lands can also devastate the livelihoods of the most vulnerable in society.



Pastoralists or herders are a particular example of a vulnerable group threatened by changes in land tenure. As populations increase, their access to traditional grazing land and water is being undermined by changes in land use for settled agriculture. Systems of land tenure reform leading to registration and fencing of semi-arid rangelands can therefore all too easily undermine the livelihoods of these pastoralists.

In recent years we have seen a growing understanding of the importance of secure access to land in the global battle to reduce poverty. Land tenure policies are now being reviewed in many developing countries including some of those represented here this week. Land tenure reform can be a force for poverty reduction and widespread economic growth. But unless in that land reform full attention is given to equity, it can also lead to the dispossession of vulnerable groups and to the widening gap between the rich and the poor instead of reducing poverty.

Following publication of the UK Government's White Paper on International Development in November 1997, my Department has reviewed what role we might play in promoting more secure access to land by poor people in developing countries. Land is an emotive and highly political subject and we must of course work in partnership in this area. I'm glad to say several African countries including Uganda, Tanzania, Mozambique, South Africa, and Zimbabwe have asked DFID for support in addressing land tenure concerns and we, of course, are very pleased to help them.

We are willing to support land tenure reform programmes which take full account of the concerns of poor people. So DFID is financing NGO's [Non-governmental organisations] to consult widely on the implications of changes that are proposed in land tenure before draft policy is converted into legislation. So the NGO's talk to the people, get their views, make sure that we take account of those views before changes are introduced. We are also willing to finance the costs of implementing land tenure policies, including mapping, survey and registration where this will address the priorities of the poor and stimulate economic growth.

Land registration is vital in urban areas and other situations where land has a high economic value. But there are situations where the costs of land registration outweigh the benefits. One such example is that of communal lands in Africa where access is controlled by representatives of the community. Even though those representatives may be unelected, it can also be the case that cultural traditions can often ensure that, by their decisions, the vulnerable are protected. Land tenure reform implies that statutory law will take precedence over customary law. Statutory legislation must be therefore drafted and implemented with great care if land reform programmes are not to undermine the safeguards inherent in traditional culture.

DFID support for land tenure reform emphasises poverty reduction, economic growth and cost effectiveness. I stress cost effectiveness because the major land registration programmes in Africa in the 1950s and 1960s were very expensive. There are valid questions to be asked about whether in some cases the benefits in terms of poverty reduction and economic growth justified the costs.



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DFID has worked, and is working, with OS International in several countries. In Montserrat mapping has played an important part in the planning of the rehabilitation programme after the devastating volcanic eruptions. The mapping is playing a crucial part in that. It is vitally important to know exactly what will happen, not just to the lava which comes out but to the mudslides that follow, and to know through careful mapping which areas those mudslides are likely to go into, so that we can identify the danger areas for the population. Mapping has been crucial in that and in a whole range of other instances in Montserrat.

In Mozambique DFID is working with Government and NGO's in helping refugees to regain access to the land they lost during the civil war – and helping to clear that land of the appalling landmines which have killed far more civilians than combatants. If you can imagine the importance of mapping in relation to knowing exactly where those mines are laid, you can see how accurate mapping can literally mean the difference between life and death. And just as the conflict in the Balkans has highlighted the importance of maps and other land information in planning that military campaign, so also crucially such information is now helping refugees to reclaim their homes and land.

Mapping is important at global as well as at community, national and regional levels. Because, for example, improved communications mean that epidemic diseases spread from country to country very rapidly. Environmental trends like deforestation or desertification need to be considered from a global perspective. All the national mapping organisations have a major role to play and the UK Government is supporting an initiative on global mapping, a subject which features in this week's programme.

The nature of government is changing and these changes have had, and will continue to have, a major impact on mapping organisations. Our Government, and others, is working for better government at lower costs and with improved services. A challenge, but a challenge which can be achieved. There is demand for faster and better services, a closer relationship with the client, and a more open relationship with the public. DFID has pioneered the latter in recent years with major public fora around the country where we have encouraged people in civil society to comment on our present and future programmes. Crucially, there is a need to bring together data from several government departments. I am delighted that this Conference will address the subject of the relationship between governments and national mapping organisations.

Finally, I hope you all enjoy the Conference and the facilities that Cambridge has to offer. For my part, and on behalf of the Government, I look forward to the book which Ordnance Survey will produce based on the outcome of the Conference and I give you this pledge: We will consider carefully, and in detail, all of your recommendations, proposals, ideas and suggestions. I hope, and indeed expect, that doing this will help our Department to develop our thinking on the role of land information in our global challenge of reducing world poverty. So thank you very much for inviting me, on behalf of the Government, to open this Conference and to say a few words at the start of it. May I wish you *bon voyage* on your future journeys of discovery.

*This document has been produced by Ordnance Survey from the Minister's speaking notes and an audio recording of the speech.*