

## **SPEECH BY REPRESENTATIVE OF THE ITALIAN AMBASSADOR**

Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you for your invitation to attend this opening ceremony today. Land cover mapping based on remote sensing is an essential tool in a number of areas: early warning, forest planning, climate change monitoring and others. The present floods in Kenya and Somalia are a sad reminder of the need for reliable and timely information to face natural emergencies and to assess their consequences.

Natural and even human phenomena are rarely contained within one country's boundaries. The regional dimension of the FAO AFRICOVER Project is one of its essential features: co-ordination of national efforts is crucial to obtain homogeneous and comparable data. We therefore welcome today's first meeting of East Africa regional co-ordinators. I am confident that this occasion will be instrumental in exchanging experiences, designing common standards, working as a team, thus creating a sense of ownership of the AFRICOVER Project shared by all participants, which is essential for the success of future endeavours.

As you know, the Government of Italy is funding the East African section of AFRICOVER with a contribution of US\$5.4 million. This comes as an expression of Italy's commitment to the development of this region, in a spirit of partnership which derives from longstanding historical links.

Let me finally wish you all a fruitful meeting.

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