

Opening Ceremony: summary notes

GGOS-Africa 2026 Workshop, Nairobi · Monday 5 October 2026 · 09:02–10:12 EAT

Moderator / programme director: Paul Baki

Written from the session transcript, which for this session is entirely machine-made (whisper.cpp; the Zoom transcript only starts at 11:15). Names and figures were checked against the programme where possible. Please check against the recording before quoting anyone.

Key points

- **GGOS-Africa was approved as a GGOS affiliate on 21 September 2026.** Several speakers called this the milestone that makes the workshop the founding meeting of a continental body.
- **The theme across all the welcomes:** Africa already has infrastructure and expertise. What it lacks is coordination, governance, sustained operations and a pipeline of people.
- **South Africa hosts the GGOS-Africa Secretariat** within the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI). Speakers stressed that “GGOS-Africa belongs to the continent”.
- **Speakers repeatedly asked for concrete outcomes:** resolutions with responsible institutions and realistic timelines, not just aspirations.

Talks

Housekeeping and introductions

Security and facilities briefing from the venue, then a welcome from the programme director on behalf of the Organising Committee. The workshop is run under the Africa–UK Physics Partnership project (funded by UK STFC). Participants then introduced themselves around the room.

Hubert Mathebula: GGOS-Africa Secretariat (DSTI, South Africa)

- Geodesy is a cornerstone of modern life, and Africa is essential geographic coverage for the global geodetic supply chain.
- Challenges: unevenly distributed and ageing infrastructure, limited capacity, fragmented reference systems, and poor data access. These need a continent-wide strategy, not country-by-country action.
- Affiliate status signals that GGOS-Africa is an organised and credible platform.
- South Africa has recently held a national geodesy workshop with over 300 registered participants, under its new **South African Geodesy Working Group**. Other countries were encouraged to set up similar national groups.
- The Secretariat should be “an enabling mechanism, not a destination”. Success depends on active participation from all member states.

Richard Gross: IAG President (recorded message)

- The IAG dates from 1862, starting with the Central European Arc Measurement, and is one of the oldest international scientific organisations.
- GGOS began as an IAG project in 2003 and became a full IAG component in 2007, bringing the technique services under one umbrella.
- GGOS affiliates: GGOS-Japan (2013), GGOS-D-A-CH (2021), GGOS Iberian-Atlantic (2024) and now GGOS-Africa.

Laura Sánchez: GGOS President (message read by Jack Radcliffe)

- GGOS celebrates the establishment of GGOS-Africa. It strengthens African visibility in global geodesy and makes GGOS “truly global and inclusive”.
- She sent apologies because GGOS Days in Sweden overlaps with the workshop. She joined online for Session 2.

André Nonguierma: UN-ECA / UN-GGIM: Africa

- African geodesy did not begin with satellites. Its history runs through the Arc of the 30th Meridian, the 12th Parallel survey (1960s–70s), the African Doppler Survey and then AFREF.
- AFREF timeline: consultations in Tunisia (May 2000) and Cape Town (2001), IAG endorsement (2001) and the Windhoek Declaration. The original goal was a permanent station within 1000 km of every user. The 2017 revamp tightened this to 500 km.
- By 2017 more than 100 stations were listed at the AFREF operational data centre, but **fewer than 50 delivered data every day**. “A station is not necessarily a station that operates... nor one that shares data... nor is shared data necessarily turned into knowledge.”
- The 2013 AFREF solution showed African analysis expertise exists. The next step is routine processing by multiple African analysis centres.
- UNGA resolution 69/266 (2015) gives governments political cover to invest.
- He proposed five commitments for the workshop:
 1. Close infrastructure gaps.
 2. Make observations and metadata openly accessible.
 3. Build data and analysis centres for a routine African solution.
 4. Develop people and institutions.
 5. Secure commitment and accountability.
- UN-ECA, through the UN-GGIM: Africa AFREF working group, will support the effort.

Nicholas Brown: UN-GGCE (online)

- At last year’s UN-GGCE capacity workshop in Nairobi (about 26 countries attended), he found a high level of existing knowledge and a strong sense of community.
- Africa has no infrastructure problem for GNSS: there are hundreds of CORS. **The gap is governance and leadership**, and GGOS-Africa can fill it.
- A coordinated body improves standing with donors, because it presents agreed priorities and better value for money.
- He highlighted regional leaders such as Ferdinand Bale, who links geodesy to land management for policymakers.
- He called a stronger link with the **radio astronomy community** a key opportunity: capacity development, and access to African VLBI infrastructure currently used for astronomy. Capacity development in Africa was discussed at a recent meeting in Manchester.

Weldon Maritim: Director of Surveys, Survey of Kenya

- Raised the misrepresentation of Africa on world maps, and Kenya’s legacy projections. Some of these were designed for military use and are still used for land registration.
- A strong geodetic reference frame is central to modernising survey and land administration in Kenya. Building stations is only the start: they need maintenance, communications, processing, QA and skilled staff.
- He named three priorities:
 1. Identify infrastructure gaps and investment needs.
 2. Strengthen cooperation in observation, processing and analysis.
 3. Develop people, especially young professionals.
- He called for actions with responsible institutions and timelines.

Opening speech: on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor, Technical University of Kenya

- The project is led by the University of Manchester and TU Kenya, funded by UK STFC. One aim is to assess geodetic infrastructure and human capital in Africa, which has never been fully documented.
- Africa uses many different national and regional reference systems, which affects cross-border development, trade and natural-resource management.
- He linked geodesy to SDGs 2, 9, 11, 13 and 15.
- He hoped for implementable recommendations and strong collaborative networks.

The ceremony closed with logistics for the group photo (11th floor), merchandise collection and the tea break.