

EDUCATION NEWS

UN Course Thematic Mapping

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In January 2011, we conducted a course for United Nations staff at the UN Logistics Base in Brindisi (Italy). This was a one-week course on cartographic design theory, thematic mapping and GIS-cartography workflow for the GIS specialists of several UN missions.

UN Mission Mapping

The UN's mandate and objectives obligate it to have a presence all over the world for purposes of peacekeeping, security, human rights and humanitarian assistance, as well as for supporting countries in transition to democracy. To this end, the UN sets up missions in many places; sometimes for short periods, sometimes longer; sometimes with only a few employees, sometimes with literally whole armies of people. For example, the longest running mission is the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), which has monitored the various ceasefires in the Middle East since May 1948 until the present day. Quite a different one was UNASOG, established to verify the withdrawal of the Libyans from the Aouzou Strip. Running from May to June 1994, it employed only nine military observers, supported by six international civilian staff. Contrast these numbers with those applying to the Darfur mission UNAMID, where you will find almost 30,000 military and civilian personnel.

As spatial information is of course very important to these missions, almost all of them have GIS and mapping specialists in their ranks. These people provide the military and civilians with up-to-date maps of the mission area, the security situation,

troop deployment, etc. Data and maps vary from large-scale and extremely detailed to small-scale and very sketchy.

Since the UN does not maintain its own military, peacekeeping forces are voluntarily provided by UN member states. The civilian staff are employed by the UN missions, which are independent organizations that find their personnel both locally in the mission countries and internationally.

UN Training Centre

Support and training for the mission staff are organized at the UN Logistics Base (UNLB) in Brindisi, in the southern part of Italy. Here the UN Training Centre is located, where personnel of the various UN missions are trained before being sent out, as well as during mission deployment. Here too is the UN GIS Centre. This centre coordinates, advises and facilitates the GIS specialists stationed at the various mission locations. Apart from training, they are responsible for the production of base geodata and maps, the building up and maintenance of a geodata repository, as well as terrain analysis and other advanced analysis tasks.

Thematic Mapping Course

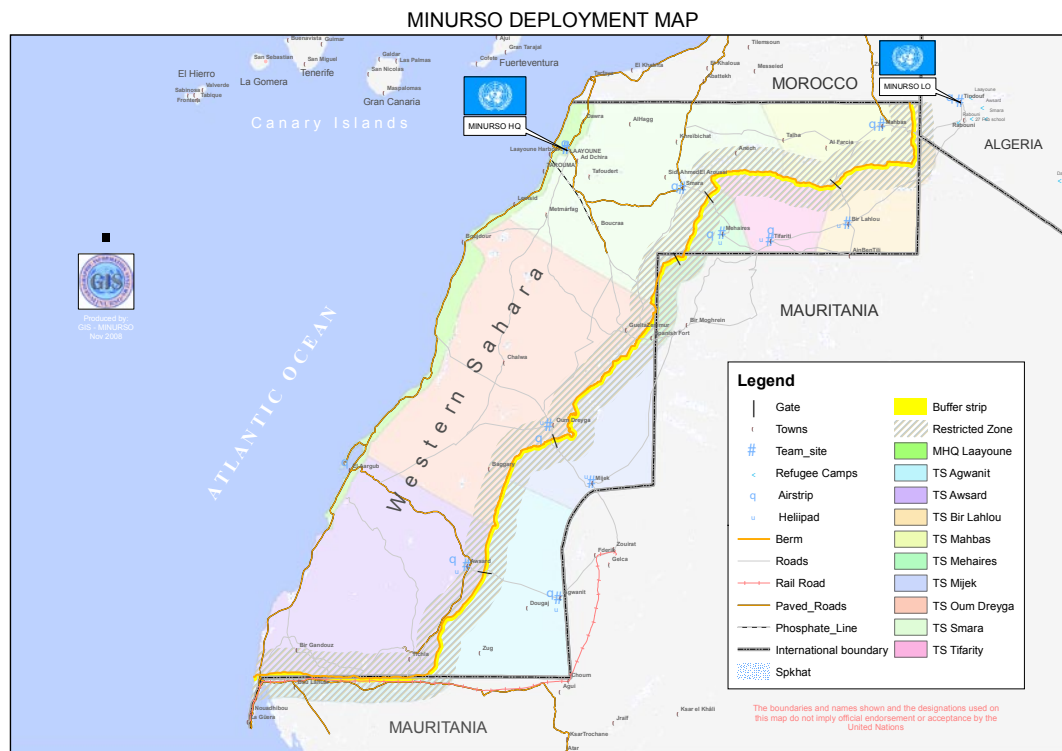
The course was set up at the request of, and in close cooperation with, the UN HQ Cartographic Section (New York). The course content was geared towards:

- giving a solid theoretical basis in cartography to the participants, who mostly came from a technical/GIS background with little formal training in cartography
- gaining a good understanding of, and a critical attitude towards, thematic mapping, with the intention of creating a common understanding of what thematic maps for UN missions could and should encompass
- taking the first steps towards developing a common "look and feel" and quality of thematic maps from the various UN missions.

UNLB Training Centre at the UNLB (Brindisi, Italy)



Example of a product from UN mission mapping: a deployment map of MINURSO, established to monitor the ceasefire between Moroccan and Polisario troops in Western Sahara and to organize a referendum on its future status



The course programme was made up of lectures, computer exercises using ArcGIS, and workshops, discussions, break-out sessions and the like. There was also a telephone conference with the UN HQ Cartographic Section on policy issues. The last day was wholly devoted to a workshop on improving UN thematic mapping by jointly developing guidelines for a workflow that could increase quality, reduce conflicts and inaccuracies, streamline editing work, and improve mapping style and usability.

Fourteen participants from nine different UN missions and from the Cartographic Section took part in the course. Among them were four ITC alumni, including Ayako Kagawa (from Japan). Having worked for a period at ITC, she is now employed at UN HQ Cartographic Section, and was our contact person and co-organizer. With a view to further developing the common "look and feel" and quality of thematic maps from the various UN missions, the UN HQ Cartographic Section will set up templates and propose a common layout and design specifications.

We are looking forward to further cooperation with the UN HQ Cartographic Section. There are plans to make this course a returning event on the UN Training Centre calendar. In addition, some research subjects have been identified that are relevant not only to UN mapping but also to the Geo-information Processing department's research themes. Moreover, UN HQ Cartographic Section staff will be active in the GFM2 module 13 on UN mapping. ■

Course participants during one of the workshops

