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### **Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names**

New York, 31 July – 9 August 2012

Item 4 of the provisional agenda\*

**Reports by Governments on the situation in their countries  
and on the progress made in the standardization of  
geographical names since the Ninth Conference  
(for distribution only).**

### **Report of Sri Lanka**

Submitted by Sri Lanka\*\*

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\*\* Prepared by Mr. S.M.W. Fernando, Surveyor General

**27<sup>th</sup> Session of the**  
**United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names**

**30<sup>th</sup> July – 10<sup>th</sup> August 2012 - New York**

**Country Report - Sri Lanka**

*by*

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**Introduction**

Sri Lanka is an island in the Indian Ocean extending from the southern tip of India having an area of 65,610 sq. km., with a large number of smaller islands around the main land, and having population of over 19 million. Sri Lanka can claim a long history of civilization based on irrigation and agriculture over 2500 years.

Geographical Names play an important role in Sri Lanka as in any other country, in terms of historical, cultural, economical, administrative, ethnic, religious, linguistics points of view.

**Activities on Geographic Names**

With regard to the Geographical Names, a Gazetteer has been prepared in the office of Geography, Department of Interior, Washington D.C in June 1960 containing official standard approved by the United States Board on Geographic Names, as well as unapproved variant names. This Gazetteer contains about 29,600 entries for places and features in the country based on 1 inch topographic map series prepared and completed in 1924 by the Survey Department of Sri Lanka being the National Mapping Organization. This map series contain all the geographical names that are in practical use at the time of preparation of the map series in respect of place/village names, natural and man made topographical features, administrative areas etc. This Map series contains 72 maps.

After Sri Lanka converted itself into the metric system of measurements in 1982, a new topographic map series was prepared on the scale of 1: 50,000, and there are 92 maps in this series. The topographic data in this map series is also available in digital vector form as a topographic vector database for GIS applications and Digital Mapping.

Another series of topographic maps and topographic vector database is being prepared on 1:10,000 scale expected to be having 1834 map sheets of which 488 available as printed maps and a total of 1368 available in the form of topographic vector database as of today. The balance is under compilation.

These databases are designed to contain many layers, of which 'PLACES', 'ADMIN' and 'HYDRO' layers contain the names as an attribute. Another development towards Geographic Names is the publication of 'Village List' available on Provincial basis and is used mainly for Cadastral Survey purposes.

## **Activities of UNGEGN**

With regard to the UNGEGN activities are concerned, one representative of the Survey Department of Sri Lanka participated for the first time in the UNGEGN history, at the 22<sup>nd</sup> session of UNGEGN held in New York from 20<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> April 2004.

Later, one representative of the Survey Department of Sri Lanka along with the Sri Lankan Permanent Representative to UN and one of his staff member participated 24<sup>th</sup> session of the UNGEGN held in New York from 20<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> August 2007 that was held along with 9<sup>th</sup> United Nations Conference on Standardization on Geographical names.

In 2011, two representatives of the Survey Department of Sri Lanka participated at the 26<sup>th</sup> session of the UNGEGN held in Vienna from 02<sup>nd</sup> to 06<sup>th</sup> May 2011.

As can be seen, there is a significant continuity in participation at UNGEGN by Sri Lankan authorities since 2004.

## **Activities on Standardization on Geographical Names**

We have made a significant progress in the field of Standardization on Geographical Names by obtaining the approval in principle from the Cabinet of Ministers to establish a Committee for Standardization of Geographical Names in Sri Lanka under the Chairmanship of the Surveyor General and are now in the process of appointing permanent staff and the members to the committee.

In 2011, the Survey Department, which is the implementing agency of standardization of geographical names in Sri Lanka was able to obtain approval from the authorities to appoint an officer in the rank of a Deputy Surveyor General to coordinate the activities of standardization of geographical names, and a separate branch has been established in the Survey Department for standardization of geographical names in Sri Lanka.

We are in the process of obtaining approval from the authorities for appointing officers for the geographical names standardization committee, which consists of 10 members including the Chairperson, who will be the Surveyor General.

It is evident that Sri Lanka has gone forward slowly but steadily in Standardization of Geographical Names in Sri Lanka, headed by the Surveyor General, and assisted by a Deputy Surveyor General in charge of Geographical Names to coordinate the Geographical Names Standardization activities.

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