

**Twenty-fifth session
Nairobi, 5–12 May 2009**

Item 16 of the provisional agenda

Activities relating to the Working Group of Pronunciation

Report of the Working Group on Pronunciation^{*}

*** Prepared by Dónall Mac Giolla Easpaig (Ireland), Convenor, Working Group on Pronunciation**

Report of the Working Group on Pronunciation

Meeting of the Working Group in Vienna, 2008.

1. Introduction.

A meeting of the Working Group on Pronunciation was held in Vienna, Austria, on 22 May 2008 in conjunction with the GeoNames08 symposium which had been organised by the Dutch- and German-speaking Division. The meeting was chaired by the Convenor and was attended by 12 experts from 9 different countries. The Chairperson of UNGEGN, Ms. Helen Kerfoot, gave the opening address in which she referred to the pronunciation element in the UNGEGN Geographical Names Database and to the role of the Working Group in providing support for the collection of audio files for that project.

1. Treatment of pronunciation in Toponymic Guidelines.

Ms. Isolde Hausner (Austria) presented a preliminary evaluation of the treatment of the pronunciation of geographical names in Toponymic Guidelines. Ms. Hausner said that she had studied a representative sample of the Toponymic Guidelines and she reported that, while there was some variation between different countries, most of the Guidelines provided some treatment of pronunciation. She informed the meeting that her full findings would be presented to the 25th Session of UNGEGN in Nairobi in 2009. The meeting agreed that Toponymic Guidelines provided a useful forum for countries to present national pronunciation tables of geographical names.

2. Pronunciation in national gazetteers

The meeting was in agreement that pronunciation tables did not always give an accurate indication as to how an individual name was pronounced and that the inclusion of pronunciation of individual geographical names in national gazetteers in International Phonetic Alphabet should be encouraged. It was noted that a number of countries gave pronunciation of individual names in their gazetteers, including Sweden and Ireland. Some experts were of the opinion that standard pronunciation presented in some gazetteers did not always reflect the pronunciation of a geographical name by local inhabitants.

3. Pronunciation in digital audio files in web-based applications.

The meeting noted the increasing potential of the internet to provide audio guides to the pronunciation of individual geographical names. The inclusion of audio files in the UNGEGN Geographical Names Database was welcomed and it was agreed that the website would provide a template for the provision of audio pronunciation of geographical names at a national level. It was noted that the technology for making audio files was inexpensive and was widely available. The meeting was told of several initiatives to provide audio pronunciation at both local and national level. Mr André Lapierre (Canada) gave a presentation of a project to provide on-line pronunciation of a number of indigenous names

from an area in British Columbia, Canada. Mr Leif Nielson (Sweden) reported that audio pronunciations for geographical names listed in Sweden's national gazetteer were available on the Swedish national radio's website. The Convenor informed the meeting that sound files giving the pronunciation of thousands of individual geographical names in both English and Irish were being included on a phased, regional, basis in the new web-based Placenames Database of Ireland (www.logainm.ie) which was due to be launched to the public in October 2008.

4. Conclusion

The concluding discussion focused on how the Working Group might encourage countries to provide guides to the pronunciation of their geographical names in national gazetteers and web-based applications. It was recommended that this could be done through the Divisions. In the case of written representation of pronunciation of geographical names, it was recommended that the guidelines for the preparation of Toponymic Guidelines should be updated to include the treatment of the subject. The meeting agreed that there was a need to establish best practice techniques for recording audio files and for making these available on web based databases and other applications and it recommended that contact be made with commercial organisations for this purpose.

5. Date of next meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Working Group would be held during the 25th Session of UNGEGN in Nairobi (5-12 May 2009).