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IMPORTANCE OF STANDARDIZING GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES STRESSED AS EXPERTS

CONCLUDE TWENTY-EIGHTH SESSION AT HEADQUARTERS

NEW YORK, (United Nations Statistics Division) — The twenty-eighth session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names concluded on 2 May at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

More than 150 experts on geographical names from all 24 linguistic/geographical divisions of the Group of Experts came together for five days to discuss and share practices, methodologies and new developments in the national standardization of geographical names. Importantly, they advanced the work undertaken in implementation of the resolutions passed at preceding conferences, the last one having been held in 2012.

While considering more than 80 working papers and six special presentations, the experts also participated in a series of workshops on various aspects of the technical treatment of geographical names. Special technical presentations were made by Esri, United Nations Cartographic Section, United Nations Statistics Division, United Nations Terminology and Reference Section and the Norwegian Mapping Authority. The overall purpose of the presentations was to raise awareness of new technological developments relating to geographical names in order to stimulate new thoughts and to encourage synergies with other related organizations.

One focus of the session concerned the establishment, safe storage and updating of authoritative standardized digital geographical names and how best to disseminate such data for the benefit of a broad spectrum of users, from citizens, to Government and non-governmental organizations. That theme was highlighted in the opening statement of the William Watt, Chairperson of the Group of Experts. It was noted that geographical names “continue to be the most fundamental and commonly used spatial identifier”, particularly as “we are entering into a period when the use of spatial data will become increasingly more and more common. Think of all the devices, websites and applications we use, often on a daily basis, that rely on spatial data.”

The session was marked another milestone for the global community, with the Group of Experts sharing the vision and goals of making national standardized geographical names available for all, and enabling decision-making for sustainable development and effective national and international communication. Geographical names are of vital significance to almost all socioeconomic activities, and each geographic entity, therefore, needs to be uniquely identified, without ambiguity. Standardization of geographical names is of vital importance and the reason why the work of the Group of Experts remains most relevant.

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