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Activities relating to the Working Group on Publicity and Funding

Activating the World Geographical Names Day

Submitted by Republic of Korea*

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Activating the World Geographical Names Day[†]

SUMMARY

This paper confirms the support for the proposal for a ‘Geographical Names Day’ proposed by the Toponymy Commission of Quebec, Canada in its Working Paper No. 35/13 submitted to the 28th Session, and suggests a few considerations to take into account in order to operationalize the proposal. If it is agreed that celebrating the day intends to draw attention from governments and the public to the importance of correct understanding of geographical names and of their standardization, the elements of the day have to be more focused on the publicity aspect. Under the framework of celebration at the UN level, each member state may adopt a few measures to operationalize at the country level.

Towards a Geographical Names Day

At the 28th Session, the Toponymy Commission of Quebec, Canada proposed that International, or World, Geographical Names Day be instituted. The proposal was motivated by the lack of awareness of the UN's geographical names standardization programme among the general public and even among government authorities. Introducing a yearly reminder was agreed to make positive contributions in terms of enhancing the awareness of geographical names. If the proposed Geographical Names Day intends to draw attention of governments and the public to the importance of correct understanding of geographical names and of their appropriate standardization, the elements of the day would have to be strategically focused on the publicity aspect.

What to declare and celebrate?

If the day celebrates the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN), it would be reasonable to declare a day during the period of the First Conference, 4-22 September. Holding a declaration ceremony during the 11th Conference in 2017 will help publicize the day through media correspondents, although the conference period may be earlier or later than the day. The name is suggested to be *World Geographical Names Day* (WGND).

In the declaration, two aspects of geographical names will need to be emphasized. One is the value of geographical names shared by people whose perception, emotions, memories and even ways of life are reflected in those names, hence the need for noting them as cultural heritage. The other is the benefits of standardizing geographical names: precise and better communication at both domestic and international levels; correct provision of geographical information; conservation of cultural heritage reflected in the names; enhancement of exchanges between nations, regions and cultures, and so on, encompassing the gamut of technical, social, cultural, and economic benefits.

[†] This working paper pertains to the UNCSGN resolutions I/4 (National standardization), V/6 (Promotion of national and international geographical names standardization programs), and IX/7 (Dissemination of information concerning the origin and meaning of geographical names).

How to proceed?

Adopting a resolution at the 11th Conference, as Canada suggested, is believed to be one of the most effective ways forward at the UN level. This resolution, which may go hand in hand with the declaration ceremony, should include two recommendations: (1) programmes to be developed by each member state to enhance awareness of and publicity on the importance of geographical names; and (2) appropriate celebration to be made by toponymic authorities of member states.

At the UNGEGN level, an *ad hoc* committee consisting of officers and convenors/coordinators would act as a steering engine to proceed with the designation of the day and promotion of related events, collaborating with the Secretariat. A prior study of other world or international days celebrated by UN bodies will provide useful hints in terms of celebrating spirit, scope, events, resources and instruments, and so on. Visual devices such as logo, symbol, and slogan shall be designed.

Activating at the level of individual member states

Each member state is expected to activate the celebration with more detailed and localized programmes.

Each country may need to find some *raison d'être* for the celebration. For example, the year 2017 is the Republic of Korea's 25th year at the UNCISG. During the twenty-five year period, a wide range of work on toponymy has been developed and implemented, both in policy and academia: standardization conforming to the UN standards, establishing names database, legislation, publishing books on toponymic origins, and so on. A celebration at the national level is expected to increase awareness among the general public, particularly students, of the importance of geographical names around them.

Even though a specific day will be designated as the World Geographical Names Day, a few programmes can be extended throughout a longer period. Possible programmes will include the following:

- Academic seminar on toponymy celebrating the day, possibly accompanied by toponymy exhibition (inviting local names authorities, commercial shareholders, academic groups, and so on)
- Contest on toponymy story-telling, in the form of essay, song or UCC (User-Created Contents)
- Toponymy Olympiad for middle and high school students
- Award for toponymy: e.g. name of the year, toponymy personnel, and book on toponymy