

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**SIXTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
NEW YORK, 25 August - 3 September 1992**

OPENING STATEMENT

by

**Mrs. Dunja Pastizzi-Ferencic, Director
Science, Technology, Energy, Environment,
and Natural Resources Division
Department of Economic and Social Development
United Nations**

Distinguished Delegates and Observers,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to the Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, on behalf of the Under Secretary-General for Economic and Social Development, Mr. Ji Chaozhu who is absent on official mission.

Although the beginning of cartographic sciences may be traced back to ancient times, the United Nations had the foresight to place this issue on the international agenda at an early stage. Thus, it was twenty five years ago, almost to the day, that the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations convened in Geneva the First United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. The present Sixth Conference is another significant event in the field of cartography in general and in the standardization of geographical names in particular. Both are

playing an increasingly important role today, at a time when we are witnessing significant changes in so many parts of the world.

In addition, our age is often referred to as the information age, and we are said to be living in an information society. Planet Earth is surrounded by a dense web of communication channels that have shrunk it and converted it into a "global village", where time and space are no longer barriers to communication. The maximum speed of information transfer has increased more than a hundred million times in the last hundred years; the amount and volume of data that have been stored can no longer be easily assimilated. Communications and information technologies increasingly penetrate all aspects of today's society and influence the economic, social, political and cultural aspects of our lives.

In this context, the new role of cartography is in itself highly symbolic of the communication era in which we live. Although its origins are closely linked to the evolution of military strategy, cartography is today, more than ever before, in the service of development. Specialized geographical maps, now often generated and updated through satellite technology, have become indispensable tools in the exploration and assessment of natural resources, in monitoring changes related to environment, population, climate and many other vital factors of economic and social development.

Current world realities and the requirements posed by sustainable development have placed new challenges before this Conference. We rely upon your collective wisdom and expertise in finding the most effective way of transliterating and standardizing names so as to avoid misunderstandings and facilitate worldwide communication, while still respecting national and cultural specificities.

Distinguished delegates,

We are all aware of the many achievements reached during these last twenty five years, although it is of course necessary to emphasize the growing number of countries which have established National Geographical Names Boards, created national toponymic guidelines and published detailed gazetteers. While deeply rooted in national actions, these activities have greatly facilitated international standardization. It should also be noted that there are numerous examples of successful cooperation between and among neighbouring countries in the standardization of geographical names in border areas as well as in areas beyond a single sovereignty. A number of training courses were conducted at both national and international levels. All this was made possible due to your successful efforts. I would like to thank all the delegations which have prepared national reports for this Conference. These reports, as well as your discussions during this Conference, will provide useful guidance for future United Nations' work in

providing cooperation and advisory services, particularly to the developing countries.

I would also like to take this opportunity to pay particular tribute to the outstanding work performed by the members of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, who must be credited for the significant role they have played in the formulation and implementation of various conference resolutions.

Distinguished Delegates,

The economic and social benefits that a country can draw from the creation or strengthening of a national names authority are well known to you. Let me reiterate that standardized geographical names are important elements for improving national and international communication, enhancing sustainable development, further developing economic planning and preserving our historic and cultural heritage.

The Department of Economic and Social Development (DESD), which I and my colleagues are privileged to serve, was created in March 1992 and it consolidates the functions and mandates of six former UN offices, departments, and centres. We feel that this significant restructuring will make the United Nations Secretariat even more effective and responsive in addressing the economic and social priorities of Member-States, and especially those of developing countries. By strengthening synergies between research

and policy analysis, operational activities and coordination in the economic and social fields, the new Department will expand and enhance technical cooperation in a wide range of substantive sectors, including remote sensing, surveying, mapping, cartography and the standardization of geographical names.

Countries requiring technical cooperation and advisory services in either the establishment or the up-dating of such national institutions involved in this subject are encouraged to seek United Nations technical cooperation, through the newly established Department of Economic and Social Development. Needless to say, we shall be glad to provide advisory services and assistance in the formulation and execution of such projects in your fields of activity and we are ready to discuss this matter further with any interested delegations.

Your agenda is wide-ranging and comprehensive, including as it does such important items as national reports, national standardization, toponymic data files, terminology, measures to implement United Nations resolutions, and exonyms, to name only a few. I am convinced that you will share my view that our tasks should also include the application of electronic data processing techniques. We should also develop strategies on how to propagate and promote the growing importance of standardization of geographical names through awareness-building, training, and fund-raising. We should expand existing networks to encourage

governments, world scientific institutions, public and private enterprises and services to support our efforts. A better public awareness of the activities of this Conference could help us all to strengthen our activities in the United Nations system and international and national levels. Only in this way can we ensure that the forthcoming Seventh International Conference will enjoy the participation of an even greater number of Member-States of the United Nations, thus providing a substantial contribution to international cooperation and understanding.

In conclusion, it is my hope that your deliberations may be fruitful and that in spite of your heavy workload and the demands imposed by your comprehensive agenda, you may be able to enjoy your stay in the Headquarters of the United Nations in New York.

I am pleased to declare open the Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

Thank you for your attention.