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RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE UNITED NATIONS PROGRAMMES:

Work of the United Nations Group
of Experts on Geographical Names

Submitted by the United States of America **/

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WORK OF THE UNITED NATIONS GROUP OF EXPERTS ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Since the Fifth Conference in 1987, the United Nations Group of Experts has continued to work diligently and effectively. With meetings in 1989 and 1991, and with a session immediately after the 5th Conference, the UNGEGN has carried out numerous assignments. This paper comments on a major task created by Resolution 4, "Work Performed by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names and its Future Activities." The author of this paper agreed to serve as convenor or a UNGEGN Working Group on Evaluation.

Reports submitted to the UNGEGN sessions in 1989 and 1991 provided results of programs the Working Group identified. These reports are available in UN files. In addition, the convenor has prepared a report for the 16th UNGEGN on the general topic. It identifies various actions and recommends their implementation by the 6th Conference.

Apart from those recommendations, the convenor calls attention to the active participation of members of the Working Group and others interested in its mission. There is little question that individuals seriously concerned with geographic names at the national and international levels agree our work can be improved. The numerous conference resolutions indicate a need to control future statements so they address realistic and practical programs. Another theme is to increase training programs so nations lacking names authorities may learn principles, policies, and procedures of standardization. A further topic is to increase contacts with national cartographic agencies in order to gain their support of names programs. Lacking a close tie with cartography, names programs may not succeed. Another program is to increase our "public relations" image by writing articles for the news media and for technical and professional societies. In some areas, UN instrumentalities should play a greater role.

We should recognize that our major goal remains unchanged: to encourage the formation of national authorities. Many have referred to Resolution 4 of the 1st UN Conference in 1967 as having defined national and international goals with clarity and depth unexcelled since then. We should strive to implement its recommendations to the fullest. Meantime, we should avoid programs of an onomastic or theoretical nature which require too great an investment of time and resource. While our mission is receiving due credit, we need to refocus our work on the tasks facing us. Not to do so will jeopardize our credibility.