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SEVENTEENTH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GROUP OF EXPERTS
ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES (UNEGN)
NEW YORK HEADQUARTERS
13 - 24 June 1994

WELCOMING STATEMENT BY MS. BEATRICE LABONNE, CHIEF,
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT BRANCH
SECRETARY, UNITED NATIONS GROUP OF EXPERTS
ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

MR. CHAIRMAN, DISTINGUISHED EXPERTS, OBSERVERS, LADIES AND
GENTLEMEN,

ON BEHALF OF THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE UNDER-SECRETARY
GENERAL FOR DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT AND MANAGEMENT SERVICES, MR. JI
CHAOZHU, I AM PLEASED TO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO WELCOME EACH OF
YOU TO THE UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS AT TURTLE BAY. TURTLE
BAY! AN EXONYM OR AN ENDONYM? WERE TURTLES COMMON ALONG THE
EAST RIVER SHORE? OR PROBABLY NOT, AND RESEARCH POINTS TOWARDS AN
EXONYM OF THE WORST CLASS. IN OTHER WORDS, "TURTLE" PROBABLY
RESULTS FROM CORRUPTING THE DUTCH NAME "DEUTAL" WHICH WAS THE
FAMILY NAME OF THE DUTCH SETTLER. THE FARM IS LONG GONE, AND IN
1994, THE BAY AS WELL AS THE TURTLE CREEK HAVE BEEN OBLITERATED
FROM THE MAP, VICTIMS OF MANHATTAN DEVELOPMENT AND URBANISATION.

THIS MAY BE A FOOTNOTE TO THE GENERAL ISSUE OF
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES. HOWEVER, ONE OF THE
OBJECTIVES OF UNEG N IS TO WORK TOWARDS THE AVOIDANCE OF NAME
CORRUPTION. IN AN ERA OF GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS, DAILY NEW
GEOGRAPHICAL DISCOVERIES AT THE LEVEL OF THE UNIVERSE, INCREASED
RECOGNITION OF INDIGENOUS CULTURES AND PRIDE, AS WELL AS
POLITICAL CHANGES, THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES MAY
LOOK LIKE A MOVING TARGET. OBVIOUSLY THE TASK OF UNEG N IS
DAUNTING, BUT AN ARRAY OF BRILLIANT TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES SUCH
AS MAP DIGITALISATION GIS AND RELATED DATABASES, JUST TO NAME A
FEW, ARE NOW AVAILABLE AND THEIR APPLICATION MORE ACCESSIBLE.
THEY CAN FACILITATE YOUR WORK AND SHOULD BE PROMOTED.

SOME TOPONYMS ARE CAPITAL LETTER NAMES WITH A GEOGRAPHICAL
SIGNIFICANCE, BUT MANY OTHERS ARE THE EXPRESSION OF HISTORICAL
AND POLITICAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS. ANOTHER CHALLENGE FACING UNEG N
IS THEREFORE TO RECONCILE GEOGRAPHY, HISTORY AND CULTURAL
HERITAGE. THIS IS PROBABLY YOUR MOST TAXING OBJECTIVE. IN ITS
RESOLUTION 48/133, THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE UNITED NATIONS
REAFFIRMED THE VALUE INTER ALIA OF TRADITIONAL CULTURES AS
EFFECTIVE EXPRESSIONS OF RESPECTIVE NATIONAL IDENTITIES.
FURTHERMORE, BY RESOLUTION 48/163, IT PROCLAIMED THE
INTERNATIONAL DECADE OF THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE, COMMENCING
ON 10 DECEMBER 1994.

YOUR WORK IN THIS PARTICULAR FIELD IS EXPECTED TO CONTRIBUTE
TO THE GOALS OF THE UNITED NATIONS TOWARDS MAKING THE WORLD A
MORE PEACEFUL PLACE TO LIVE IN.

THE AGENDA OF THE SEVENTEENTH SESSION OF THE UNGEGN IS VERY EXTENSIVE, IT INCLUDES SOME 17 SUBSTANTIVE ITEMS. TWO OF THESE ITEMS ARE PARTICULARLY SIGNIFICANT. I WOULD LIKE, MR. CHAIRMAN, TO REFER TO ITEMS 13 AND 17 WHICH WILL ADDRESS THE NEED FOR PUBLICITY, FUNDING AND THE AIMS AND FUNCTIONS OF UNGEGN. YOUR EFFORTS SINCE THE BEGINNING OF UNGEGN IN 1960 MUST BE ACTIVELY PROMOTED AND PUBLICIZED. YOUR OBJECTIVES AND ACHIEVEMENTS ALSO DESERVE A BROADER VISIBILITY WITHIN THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM AND THE PUBLIC AT LARGE.

MR. CHAIRMAN, THE SESSION OFFERS A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS THESE ISSUES.

THE UNITED NATIONS OFFERS A UNIQUE UMBRELLA FOR THE FULFILLMENT OF OBJECTIVES SUCH AS THOSE OF UNGEGN. I HOPE THAT WHEN REVISING YOUR AIMS AND FUNCTIONS, OUR RELATIONSHIP WILL BE FURTHER STRENGTHENED FOR ENHANCED EFFICIENCY AND OUT REACH. NEXT YEAR, THE UNITED NATIONS WILL CELEBRATE ITS 50 YEAR ANNIVERSARY. IT IS INTENDED TO BE BOTH A CELEBRATION AND A COMMEMORATION. THIS MILESTONE LENDS ITSELF TO PROMOTING YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS AS WELL. MY COLLEAGUES AND MYSELF STAND READY TO FURTHER DISCUSS THIS ISSUE WITH YOU.

SINCE THE PREVIOUS MEETING OF THE GROUP OF EXPERTS IN AUGUST 1992, CHANGES HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN OUR DEPARTMENT. IN AUGUST 1993, THE DEPARTMENT FOR DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT AND MANAGEMENT SERVICES WAS ESTABLISHED AS THE RESULT OF THE DIVISION OF THE FORMER DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT. AS YOU VERY WELL KNOW, NAMES KEEP CHANGING ALL THE TIME. HOWEVER, DDSMS RETAINED THE ORIGINAL MANDATE IN CARTOGRAPHY. IT IS NOT COINCIDENTAL THAT CARTOGRAPHY HAS BEEN INCORPORATED INTO THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT BRANCH. CARTOGRAPHIC SCIENCE AND APPLICATIONS ARE BECOMING MORE AND MORE FUNDAMENTAL TO IMPLEMENT ACTIONS NECESSARY TO MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH.

SOME PEOPLE HAVE ALSO GONE. MY PREDECESSORS, MR. EL ARABY AND MR. GUEYE, RESPECTIVELY, HAVE NOW RETIRED. HOWEVER, THE BRANCH'S CARTOGRAPHIC TEAM IS HERE TO ASSIST YOU DURING THE DURATION OF YOUR MEETING. LET ME INTRODUCE TO YOU MESSRS. STABE AND MOSKALENKO. THEY WILL SERVE AS AN ALTERNATES TO THE SECRETARY OF YOUR MEETING.

ONCE AGAIN, WELCOME TO THE UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS, AND I WISH YOU A VERY SUCCESSFUL AND STIMULATING DELIBERATIONS SEVENTEENTH SESSION OF UNGEGN.

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY

I would like to report to you our activities in the field of cartography

1. Since the Fifteenth Session (24 August and 4 September 1992, New York, one day before and one day after the Sixth UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names) three issues of the Group's Newsletter, Nos. 10 to 12, have been published.
2. The Fifth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for the Americas took place in New York, from 11 - 15 January 1993.
3. The conference stressed the important role of Cartography for both sustainable development and environmental protection. It reaffirmed the need for the United Nations to continue to provide guidance and direction for the international transfer of modern technology as well as technical assistance to developing countries in all fields of modern cartography: surveying, mapping, Geographic/Land Information Systems etc.
4. For the first time in 16 years, the Fifth Conference for the Americas was presided over by a woman, and a document entitled "The role of women in surveying and mapping" was presented and discussed with great enthusiasm; a resolution among 11 others, calling for increased participation of women in all fields of cartography, was adopted.
5. Another resolution recommended that the United Nations, together with the international scientific community, examine the feasibility of establishing an international advisory group to help developing countries acquire modern technologies in cartography.
6. The Conference also recommended that the United Nations provide advice to smaller nations through regional seminars on developing Geographic and Land Information Systems. Member States were urged to make publicly funded land and geographical data sets available at the least possible cost. The Conference believed that any constraints on the availability of digital land and geographical information were "in conflict with the clear aims and spirit of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED)".
7. Among the actions taken, participants recognized the need to establish environmental information systems for sustainable development in developing countries. To that end, it was recommended that the Secretariat, in cooperation with the coordinating committees concerned, suggest effective means to introduce such systems in developing countries.

8. Resolutions on training cooperation called on the United Nations to support the awarding of fellowships in mapping technology to candidates from developing countries in cooperation with international scientific and professional organizations. The resolutions also called on the Organization to support training courses in the application of cartography to development projects.

9. Though there was some discussion, no resolutions regarding the standardization of geographical names were adopted. The Conference was attended by 100 representatives and observers from 35 countries, three specialized agencies and seven intergovernmental and international scientific organizations. The Conference decided that the Sixth Conference be held in early 1997.

10. The Thirteenth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Pacific took place in Beijing, from 9 - 18 May 1994, at the invitation of the Government of the People's Republic of China, and under the auspices of the National Bureau of Surveying and Mapping of China.

11. The primary objective of the Conference was to further technical cooperation between the countries of the region and those of the rest of the world. The Conference provided an opportunity to build and strengthen collaboration with scientific and professional organizations.

12. The Conference, a turning-point for these conferences in Asia and the Pacific, reappraised the goals of cartography and related techniques to meet the "sustainability challenge" of the twenty-first century.

13. It was stressed that cartographic technologies play an effective and cost-efficient role in registering, monitoring and depicting earth and environment phenomena.

14. In the spirit of the Declaration of Barbados, the Conference addressed the issue of the environmental vulnerability of small island developing States, and also acknowledged that cartographic techniques were crucial tools for environmental monitoring and for the prediction of potential natural disasters.

15. The important role held by women in cartography was recognized; it was also noted that women were underrepresented at conferences and seminars. The Conference called upon national surveys to create opportunities for career advancement of women staff members.

16. Finally, the Conference adopted 20 resolutions, dealing with transfer of technology, policy and institutional issues. The overriding theme of the resolutions was that cartography and related techniques are a fundamental tool to meet the goals of

Agenda 21 - the comprehensive program of action adopted by the UNCED to halt and reverse environmental degradation and prompt sustainable and environmentally sound development in all countries.

17. One resolution on geographical names was adopted as follows.

Geographical Names

The Conference,

Recalling resolution 18 of the Eleventh United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Pacific,

Recognizing the importance of national programs of geographical names standardization,

Recognizing further the progress achieved in the standardization of geographical names by member countries of the Division of Asia South East and Pacific South West,

Endorses the decision of the member countries of the Division of Asia, South East and Pacific, South West of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names that New Zealand is elected as the Divisional Representative. This decision was taken during the Ad Hoc meeting of member countries on 25 February 1991 at the venue of the 12th United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and Pacific, Bangkok.

Records with appreciation the invaluable contributions of Malaysia as the outgoing divisional representative.

18. The participants recommended that the Economic and Social Council should convene the Fourteenth such conference for Asia and the Pacific region in mid-1997 with a primary focus on the contribution of surveys, mapping and charting in support of the implementation of Agenda 21.

19. Participating in the Conference were 204 representatives and observers from 27 countries and territories, two specialized agencies and three intergovernmental organizations.