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Expert meeting at UN aims to encourage more accurate use of place names

20 April 2004 – Some 150 experts, representing 22 linguistic or geographical divisions around the world, gathered today at United Nations Headquarters in New York to encourage the development of more consistency and accuracy in the use of place names, especially on maps and in gazetteers.

The UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names will meet for 10 days, during which they are expected to discuss and propose steps to standardize written forms of geographical names. This will include measures on how to Romanize place names being converted from languages that use non-Roman script.

William De Vries, Officer-in-Charge of the UN Statistics Division, said the last conference of experts on the issue, held in 2002 in Berlin, agreed to a set of recommendations that stressed that standardized place names form “part of a nation’s cultural and historical heritage.”

Mr. De Vries said consistent geographical names, especially when disseminated widely, helped the development of cartography, urban and regional planning, peacekeeping, tourism and commerce. They also strengthened the preservation of cultural heritage.

In a statement, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) said consistent and accurate place names promote more effective communication worldwide.

Experts on standardizing place names wrap up meeting at UN



29 April 2004 – A United Nations expert group on standardizing the way place names are spelt and pronounced, both locally and by the world at-large, wrapped up its latest session today at UN Headquarters in New York.

With harmonized place names becoming an essential element of international communication, nearly 200 experts met for the past eight days during the 22nd session of the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN).

One initiative to emerge from this year's session was the formation by African countries of a Task Team, headed by representatives from Ghana, Algeria and South Africa, to rally support for the establishment of domestic names committees and accelerate the standardization of geographical names on the continent.

A German proposal seeking to combine national data stocks of officially approved geographical names from each of the European Union member countries into a European geographical names network, to be called EuroGeoNames, was also announced.

UNGEGN first convened in 1960 to encourage the consistent use of place names through international collaboration, the wider use of nationally authorized names and the development of guidelines, digital place name databases and training programmes.

Its next session is scheduled to take place in 2006 in Vienna.