

RESOLUTIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCES ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Resolutions and the subjects they address

The United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names have been held every five years since 1967. Resolutions on technical issues have been passed by each Conference and endorsed by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

Substantive resolutions on the subject of geographical names cover a range of associated topics, which link to the technical, economic, social and cultural benefits of national standardization. In general the resolutions provide guidelines and frameworks for national and regional activity and action, relating to:

- National names authorities
- Geographical names databases
- Gazetteers – paper and digital
- Training courses in toponymy
- Romanization systems
- Country names
- Terminology
- Pronunciation
- Exonyms
- Toponymic guidelines
- Features beyond a single sovereignty
- Promoting the use of indigenous, minority and regional language group geographical names



Photo: Yacob Zewoldi

One of the most quoted resolutions is no. 4 from the First Conference (I/4), which addressed in detail the basic information about national standardization through development of national names authorities, preserving name records and distributing this information worldwide. Although technology has developed dramatically over more than 45 years since the first conference in 1967, the concept of recognizing local usage of names, authorizing their spelling and application, and distributing the data, are still valid today. These principles have been reinforced in various resolutions over the years.

To move from national standardization of geographical names to their standard use internationally the conversion between writing systems is all important. So far most of this work has focussed on conversion to the Roman alphabet. Resolutions address general aspects of Romanization as well as single scientific systems of romanization for 30 scripts.

Today, world need for spatially referenced data is growing to address issues of climate change, carbon monitoring, disaster response, and so on. The role of standardized geographical names in spatial data information management is underlined in resolutions, such as VIII/6 (2002), which recommended that standardized geographical names data be included in the design, development and implementation of national and regional spatial data infrastructures, and VIII/7 (2002), which recommended that UNGEGN promote the development of international toponymic data exchange standards.

Cultural heritage aspects of geographical names have not been forgotten. Fieldwork treatment of toponyms, multilingual situations, social and cultural benefits of standardization, exonyms, and indigenous, minority and regional language group names have all been the subject of Conference resolutions. Resolution VIII/9 (2002) and resolution IX/4 (2007) recognized the significance of geographical names to a nation's cultural heritage, urged promotion of a greater public understanding of names and identity, and made links to the conventions of UNESCO.



Photo: David Munro

Availability of the texts of resolutions

(<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/confGeneral.html>)

A compendium of all resolutions in thematic groups has been compiled and is available in English, French, and Spanish on the UNGEGN website. The public can also make word or thematic searches of the resolutions on a database, recently developed and available on the web; initially the resolution texts are available in English and in French.

Following up resolutions

Between Conferences it is the task of UNGEGN to follow up on implementation of the resolutions. At recent Conferences the UNGEGN Secretariat has prepared a schema to show progress on addressing resolutions from the previous Conference.



Photo: UN photo library



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