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**Item 9 of the Provisional Agenda**

**Activities relating to the Working Group on  
Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers**

**A New Geographical Name Sejong for the Multifunctional  
Administrative City in the Republic of Korea \***

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\* Prepared by the National Geographic Information Institute, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, Republic of Korea, Sang-Hyun Chi and Sungjae Choo (Republic of Korea)

# **A New Geographical Name Sejong for the Multifunctional Administrative City in the Republic of Korea<sup>†</sup>**

## **SUMMARY**

The Republic of Korea has proceeded with the project of relocating two-thirds of its government offices for the balanced national development and decentralization. The original plan was drafted in 2005 and the construction of new Multifunctional Administrative City (MAC) has continued. The government of the Republic of Korea has tried to reflect the opinion of the citizen to name the MAC. People suggested new names through various channels, and the government established an institution to facilitate naming procedures. A naming committee was established and evaluated names proposed by a national survey and reviews of experts in terms of congruence between city vision and name, linguistic consideration, and other cultural and political contexts. The name of MAC was decided as *Sejong*. The city is named after King Sejong the Great who profoundly impacted Korean history with the introduction of *Hangeul*, the alphabet system of the Korean language and technological advances during his reign in the 15th century.

### **Background of the new city project**

The Republic of Korea has experienced remarkable economic growth since 1960s. The unprecedented economic success can be indebted to rapid industrialization and urbanization that were supported and tuned by several national economic and territorial development plans. National resources have been channeled to a few economic regions, including Seoul and the Capital Region (CR). To date, the strategy of concentrated development proved itself successful in terms of economic indices at the national scale, such as economic growth rate and per-capita GDP. Despite the bright side of the economic growth, however, the excessive concentration in Seoul and the CR and uneven development has been a grave concern in the Republic of Korea. There were growing voices that the supremacy of Seoul would not allow people to live and invest in any other area than Seoul and the CR. Finally, in 2005, the government announced a plan to relocate governmental offices located in Seoul, and enacted a special law to construct a Multifunctional Administrative city (MAC). The new city was expected to accommodate a part of functions that Seoul used to keep in its city proper. Many governmental offices were planned to move to the MAC. The site of MAC included the land of Gongju-si (city) and Yeongi-gun (county) located about 130km south of Seoul. A mega construction project soon began.

### **Need of a new name and institutional preparation**

In the process of constructing the MAC, many temporary city names were used, which created

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<sup>†</sup> This working paper pertains to the UNCSGN resolutions II/32 (Dissemination of decisions by national authorities), VI/8 (Information from countries regarding changes in geographical names) and IX/7 (Dissemination of information concerning the origin and meaning of geographical names).

confusion among people. The naming of the MAC was not a task to be postponed. On February 22, 2006, the Prime Minister’s office decided that the MAC Construction Committee would make the procedure of naming the city before the end of the year 2006. The MAC Construction Committee announced that the new name of the MAC would be decided under the consideration of the vision, history, brevity, and publicity. The Committee also decided a contest as a way of gathering public opinions. To facilitate the naming process, the City Naming Committee was formulated in April 28, 2006. The City Naming Committee organized a sub-committee consisting of toponymists, historians, urban planners, writers, geographers, economists, and civil servants to expedite the process. The sub-committee finalized the methods and criteria to review names proposed by the public competition. It was decided that the sub-committee would choose the final top 20 names and the City Naming Committee would narrow them down to top 10. The Committee agreed on the criteria to review, which were geographic and historical characteristics, symbolic meaning, publicity, and internationality of the names.

**Process of reviewing public opinion**

The public competition was held from July 27 to September 30, 2006. 2,163 proposals were submitted by internet, mail, fax, and visit at the committee office. Excluding duplicated proposals, 1,383 proposals were evaluated by the sub-committee. Each member of the sub-committee chose 50 names respectively, which ended up 203. They were narrowed down to 20 at the third sub-committee meeting. The City Naming Committee, at its 4<sup>th</sup> meeting, agreed on the final 10 candidates. The final ten names are listed at the table below with their origins or meanings.

name			origin or meaning
Romanized	Korean	Chinese characters	
Gaon	가온		center of the territory
Geumgang	금강	錦江, 金剛	a river close to the MAC, a homonym of diamond in Korean
Daewon	대원	大圓, 大原	big circle
Sejong	세종	世宗	King Sejong the Great who made the Korean alphabet system, Hangeul
Saeseoul	새서울		new Seoul
Saebeol	새벌		new field
Yeongi	연기	燕岐	name of the county where the MAC is located
Yeonju	연주	延州, 燕州	combination of Yeongi county and Gongju city
Hanul	한울		in a same or big fence, focusing on the territorial and ethnic integrity
Haengbok	행복		acronym of Multifunctional Administrative City, a homonym of happiness in Korean

The Committee conducted a national-wide survey to see the public opinion on the 10 candidates, including phone survey, internet poll through the websites of Multifunctional Administrative City Construction Agency, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Ministry of Construction and Transportation. The Committee also listened to the opinions of adjacent provinces, cities, and counties.

### **Decision of the name: Sejong**

Under the consideration of experts, public opinions, local and regional governments, the final three names were announced on the 5th meeting of the Committee. The final three were *Geumgang*, *Sejong* and *Hanul*. The MAC Construction Committee suggested a second round national survey to hear public opinion on the proposed names. The second national survey was conducted in December, 2006 to the randomly chosen 2,000 samples. Referring to the survey result, the 6th meeting of the Committee discussed the strength and weakness of proposed names. Geumgang received good reviews because the name is familiar to local people. The opposition was, however, stemmed from the fact that the name came from a river, which might cause confusion between the river and city name. With regards to Hanul, the positive aspect lies in the linguistic perspectives. Hanul is not a foreign originated word, and has a similar phonetic structure to that of Seoul. However, the main weakness is its religious nuance since Hanul refers to sky or universe in Cheondoism, one of the religions in Korea.

Finally, the MAC Construction Committee confirmed the name *Sejong*. Although it is the first time for Koreans to name a city after the name of a person, Sejong received good reviews since King Sejong the Great, was highly respected in the Korean history, and it was already a common practice give commemorative names in many other countries (e.g., Washington, D.C). King Sejong the Great, the fourth king of the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910 A.D.) invented Korean alphabets, *Hangeul*. King Sejong the Great's creativity, originality and vision for future well represented the vision of the MAC. Furthermore, in terms of phonetic perspectives, Sejong has a very simple and clear pronunciation structure [Sedʒoŋ]. The simple phonetic structure was thought to be important since it enabled the international society to call the name with ease.

The Sejong Special Self-Governing City was officially launched on July 1, 2012, as the 17<sup>th</sup> large local municipality. The population of Sejong City is 126,260 as of the end of 2013 and growing. At the end of 2014, 16 central governmental offices, 20 government-affiliated agencies and 16 research centers will reside in this new city, Sejong.



Figure 1. The location of the Sejong Special Self-Governing City

