

**Twenty-eight session  
New York, 28 April – 2 May 2014**

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

## **SUMMARY**

The Republic of Korea has conducted a grand project of relocating two-thirds of its government offices for balanced national development and decentralization. The original plan was drafted in 2005 and the construction of the new Multifunctional Administrative City (MAC) has continued. The government of the Republic of Korea has made efforts to reflect the opinion of citizens to name the MAC. New names were suggested 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. Naming authorities finalized their decision to select *Sejong* as the name of the MAC. This name was given to the city in honor of King Sejong the Great who had a profound influence on Korean history by introducing *Hangeul*, the alphabet system of the Korean language as well as significant technological advances during his reign in the 15<sup>th</sup> 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 supported and tuned by several national economic and territorial development plans. National resources have been channeled to a few economic regions, including the Seoul Metropolitan Area (SMA). 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 SMA 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 areas other than Seoul and the SMA. 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 certain functions that Seoul used to keep in its city proper. Many governmental offices were planned to be transferred to the MAC. The site of the MAC included the land of Gongju-si (city) and Yeongi-gun (county) located about 130km south of Seoul. A mega construction project soon began.

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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).

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

During the process of constructing the MAC, many temporary city names were used, which created confusion among the people. The naming of the MAC was not a task to be delayed. On February 22, 2006, the Prime Minister's Office decided that the MAC Construction Committee would follow through procedures 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 to host a national contest as a means 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 via the public competition. It was decided that the sub-committee would shortlist the top 20 names and the City Naming Committee would narrow them down to the top 10. The Committee agreed on the criteria to review, the geographic and historical characteristics, symbolic meaning, publicity, and internationality of the names.

### **Process of reviewing public opinion**

The public contest was held from July 27 to September 30, 2006. As much as 2,163 proposals were submitted by internet, mail, fax, and in person. Excluding overlapping proposals, 1,383 proposals were evaluated by the sub-committee. Each member of the sub-committee selected 50 names respectively, which added up to 203 names. 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 invented the Korean alphabet system, <i>Hangeul</i>
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		within the same fence or big fence, focusing on territorial and ethnic integrity
Haengbok	행복		acronym of the Multifunctional Administrative City, a homonym of happiness in Korean

The Committee conducted a nation-wide survey to collect the public opinion on the 10 candidates, through phone surveys, internet polls through the websites of the 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**

As a result of careful consideration by experts, public opinions, local and regional governments, the final three names were announced at the 5<sup>th</sup> Committee meeting. The final three were *Geumgang*, *Sejong* and *Hanul*. The MAC Construction Committee suggested that a second round of national surveys be conducted to gather public opinion on the proposed names. The second national survey was conducted in December 2006 to the randomly chosen 2,000 samples. Based on the results of the survey, the 6<sup>th</sup> Committee meeting discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed names. *Geumgang* received positive reviews due to its familiarity to locals. The opposition, however, stemmed from the fact that the name coincided with the name of a river, which could cause confusion between the names of the river and city. With regard to *Hanul*, the positive aspect lay in the linguistic perspectives. *Hanul* is a pure Korean word which has a similar phonetic structure to that of Seoul. However, the main weakness was its religious nuance since *Hanul* refers to sky or universe in Cheondoism, one of the religions of Korea.

Ultimately, 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 historical figure, *Sejong* received positive reviews since King *Sejong* the Great, was highly respected in Korean history, and since it was already a common practice to give commemorative names to geographical locations 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 the Korean alphabet, *Hangeul*. King *Sejong* the Great's creativity, originality and vision for the future is well represented the vision of the MAC. Furthermore, in terms of phonetics, *Sejong* has a very simple and clear phonetic structure [Sedʒon]. A 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> largest local municipality in Korea. The population of *Sejong* City numbers 126,260 as of the end of 2013 and is 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