

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

6 August 2012

**Tenth United Nations Conference on the
Standardization of Geographical Names**

New York, 31 July – 9 August 2012

Item 16(a) of the provisional agenda*

Features beyond a single sovereignty and international cooperation:

Features common to two or more nations

**Japan's position on the name "Sea of Japan" in relation to papers
and materials prepared for item 16 (a) and other items of the agenda**

Submitted by Japan**

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** Prepared by the Government of Japan

Japan's position on the name "Sea of Japan" in relation to papers and materials prepared for item 16 (a) and other items of the agenda

As Japan has stated at the previous sessions, the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSSGN) is not an appropriate forum to discuss the naming of individual geographical features such as "Sea of Japan." There is a common understanding among Member States that this Conference does not have a mandate to decide the name of any particular geographical feature. As for geographical features beyond the sovereignty of any nation, including the "Pacific Ocean," the "Indian Ocean" or the "Sea of Japan," even discussing the naming of such features should be out of the scope of the Conference.

It is, therefore, regrettable that a few countries have persistently tried to challenge the validity of the name "Sea of Japan" at the previous sessions, resulting in an undue politicization of the Conference and damage to its reputation as an academic and technical forum. It is also regrettable that a few working papers and distributed materials prepared for item 16 (a) and other items of the agenda of this 10th session of the UNCSSGN, ignoring the collective will of Member States, refer to the name "Sea of Japan" as if it were an issue to be discussed at the UNCSSGN. Japan is firmly committed to making every effort to preserve the integrity of the UNCSSGN by opposing any attempt to interject inappropriate and politically motivated issues into the UNCSSGN.

Japan held two bilateral talks in good faith with the Republic of Korea (ROK) since the 9th Session of the UNCSSGN in 2007. Japan is committed to continuing these efforts. However, Japan regrets that there has been no progress in the talks with the ROK, because the ROK has so far shown no flexibility and simply repeats its unfounded allegations. For example, the ROK insists that the international use of the name "Sea of Japan" was established as a result of Japan's rule over Korean Peninsula in the early 20th century. This argument is totally unjustified in light of the historical fact that the name "Sea of Japan" was established by the early 19th century, well before Japan could have any international influence whatsoever.

In this relation, Japan notes that the ROK government published an official document on November 20th, 2007, endorsing the result of a survey conducted by its experts (note). The survey concludes that the name Japan Sea came rapidly in wider use internationally as early as in the early 19th century, from 1830 onwards. That was a period when Japan solidly maintained its policy to seclude itself from the outside world, and several decades before Japan could have any international influence whatsoever. Japan notes that this ROK official document could indicate that the ROK government has virtually already retracted its claim that the established international use of the name Japan Sea represents the "remains of Japan's colonial rule" and thus "came into wider use in the 20th century." Japan also notes that the ROK government unilaterally and voluntarily used the English name Japan Sea in its official documents until recent time, including its official nautical chart (102A) published in 1993 that remained in use until 1995.

Japan would also like to reiterate the fact that Japan Sea remains the only established status quo international name for the sea-area, just like such names as the Indian Ocean, Tasman Sea or South China Sea, used by the UN Secretariat, the IHO, and other international organizations. The name is used by governments around the world including the U.S. and those in the region including China and Russia.

This Conference should also be reminded that the Resolution of the UNCSGN III/20, which is often quoted by the ROK government as a justification for two sea-names being used concurrently, explicitly states that the scope of the resolution is limited to geographical features that are “under the sovereignty of more than one country” or are “divided among two or more countries”. A mountain straddling international borders should be a typical case to which this resolution could be applied. It is thus obvious that this resolution has no relevance to such geographical features as oceans and seas, which are essentially under no territorial sovereignty except for the narrow 12-mile-maritime-belt. Nor would it be practical or politically sensible to allow countless different local names in different languages of respective littoral regions as well as ships and mariners frequenting these sea-areas, to challenge internationally established sea-names with a guarantee to be printed concurrently in case no agreement is reached. For the same reason, the IHO’s technical resolution A.4.2.6 explicitly limits its scope to maritime features that are “shared” by countries. The resolution further states that these features are typically “a bay, strait, channel or archipelago.” The most major maritime features, which are the oceans and the seas, are clearly excluded.

Japan has to stress that those working papers, materials and arguments by North Korea and the ROK conspicuously ignore the above-mentioned documented and well-known facts. Japan also appeals to all members of the United Nations to refrain from taking any step tantamount to acquiescing and legitimizing these unfounded claims by North Korea and the ROK, which would inevitably add to the twenty-year-old confusion regarding the use of the established international sea-name of Japan Sea. In addition, these steps could well give rise to new tensions regarding other established international ocean/sea-names hitherto uncontested.

(end)

(note) ROK government (Ministry of Construction and Transport) public press release, “History of the Korean Map in the World History at a glance”, released to the public on November 20th 2007 (as provisionally translated in English by Japan)