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Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

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Item 6 of the provisional agenda*

National and international meetings, conferences, symposiums, publicity and publications

National workshop on the standardization of geographical names

Submitted by South Africa**

Summary***

The South African Geographical Names Council and the Department of Arts and Culture convened a public workshop on 12 and 13 April 2012 on the subject of geographical naming. Its theme was “Towards forging a common understanding on public participation and consultation on standardization of geographical names”. It was the latest in a series of public consultations that the Government had convened, which had identified three themes that needed to be addressed: the nature of consultation, the administration of geographical names at provincial and local government levels and international coordination. More than 500 participants attended, including representatives of Government and civil society and delegates from 13 other countries.

Speakers from the Government and the South African Geographical Names Council distinguished between name changing and the standardization of geographical names. Standardization is a technical process undertaken in terms of the guidelines of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, which has many practical applications. The Minister of Arts and Culture, Paul Mashatile, told the gathering that the Government sees geographical naming as “a process that seeks to contribute towards building an inclusive society, rooted in the principles of equality, freedom and dignity for all”.

* E/CONF.101/1.

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*** The full report is available in the language of submission only from <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/ungegnConf10.html>.



The workshop scrutinized the South African Geographical Names Council Act in the light of the South African constitution and the Promotion of Administrative Justice Act and identified ways in which the Act can be revised and procedures put in place to ensure that the process of geographical naming allows the public full rights of consultation and objection. Detailed proposals were formulated to ensure that provincial and local geographical names committees are put on a secure legal and administrative footing and that the procedures for cooperation between the geographical names bodies at national, provincial and local government levels are spelled out.

Detailed proposals were also formulated for the promotion of national geographical names bodies in African countries and their support through international structures.
