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

New York, 31 July – 9 August 2012

Item 5 of the provisional agenda

**Reports by divisions of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names on the situation in their divisions and on the progress made in the standardization of geographical names since the Ninth Conference**

### Report of the Asia South-East and Pacific South-West Division

Submitted by the Asia South-East and Pacific South-West Division\*\*

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\* E/CONF.101/1.

\*\* Prepared by Datuk Prof. Sr Dr. Abdul Kadir bin Taib (Malaysia), Chairman of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names for Asia South-East and Pacific South-West Division.

## **Overview**

Malaysia was elected as a new Chair for the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names for Asia South-East and Pacific South-West Division (UNGEGN ASEPSWD) during the Seventeenth Divisional Meeting in Sydney, Australia on 10 April 2010. The Chairmanship is for five years period as from August 2010 to August 2015. The previous Chair was held by Mr. Rudolf W. Matindas (Indonesia) for the period of August 2006 to August 2010. This Division comprises of twenty-two (22) member countries namely Australia, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Fiji, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Samoa, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Vanuatu and Vietnam.

## **Divisional Activity**

### **1. Meeting**

Since the Ninth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN), held in New York in 2007, meetings of the Division have included:

- (a) The Fifteenth Divisional Meeting held in Jakarta Indonesia on 24 November 2008. The meeting was attended by four (4) member countries from Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore.
- (b) The Sixteenth Divisional Meeting held in Bali, Indonesia on 4 August 2009. The meeting was attended by four (4) member countries from Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam.
- (c) The Seventeenth Divisional Meeting held in Sydney, Australia on 10 April 2010. The meeting was attended by six (6) member countries from Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, New Zealand, Philippine and Australia.
- (d) The Eighteenth Divisional Meeting was held in Kuala Lumpur on 22 February 2011. The meeting was attended by five (5) member countries from Philippine, Indonesia, Singapore, Brunei Darussalam and Malaysia. During this seminar, speakers from Indonesia, Philippine and Brunei Darussalam were invited to present their respective geographical names activities of their countries. The Late Prof. Emeritus Dr. Ir. Jacob Rais also presented an Indonesian case study on *Generic Names across Languages in the Region*.
- (e) An informal meeting was held at the United Nations Vienna Office on 4 May 2011 during the Twenty-Sixth Session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, to discuss several issues which were raised during the Eighteenth Divisional Meeting in Kuala Lumpur on 22 February 2011.
- (f) The Nineteenth Divisional Meeting was held in Manila, Philippine on 28 February 2012. In conjunction with this meeting a Seminar on Geographical Names was held on the 27<sup>th</sup> February 2012. The meeting was attended by five (5) member countries from Indonesia, Brunei Darussalam, Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines.

- (g) Brunei Darussalam has consented to host the upcoming Twentieth Divisional Meeting on 6 – 7 May 2013, in conjunction with the Sixtieth Anniversary (Diamond Jubilee) of their Survey Department.

## **2. Activities**

Toponymic activities in the region have been carried in the context of individual country objectives and needs in accordance to the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names resolutions. In addition, the following activities are noted:

- (a) The efforts of Australia and New Zealand in compiling a regional map and gazetteer have been completed. The regional maps and gazetteer will be presented to UNGEGN during the UNCSGN and UNGEGN meeting in New York by Australia.
- (b) This regional map will contribute towards the completeness of the geographical names database of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.
- (c) Australia displayed relevant information pertaining to UNGEGN ASEPSW Division on the web site operates by Australia GOVDex. This web is a means for member countries to communicate about issues pertaining to the Division. This website also displays regional map and gazetteer.
- (d) Indonesia planned to hold an International Toponymy course in mid September 2012 in cooperation with UNGEGN. Two representatives per member country are invited to attend the training.

## **3. Proposal Splitting of the Division**

- (a) The United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, Asia South-East and Pacific South-West Division was originally set up in 1972 as Asia South-East Division in accordance with the second United Nations Conference on the Standardisation of Geographical Names (UNCSGN) Resolution II/4, which was held in London. During the Ninth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference (UNRCC) for Asia and the Pacific held in Wellington, it was recommended that the Division should be enlarged and renamed as Asia South-East and Pacific South-West. Subsequently this recommendation was adopted during the Fifth Divisional Meeting in Bogor, Indonesia in October 1980 which was chaired by Malaysia and attended by Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. The Fifth Divisional Meeting Report was submitted at the Ninth UNGEGN Session, New York, 17-27 February 1981 and listed as Working Paper No.5.
- (b) At the Sixth Asia, South-East and Pacific South-West Divisional Meeting from 29 to 30 September 1992 held in Wellington, New Zealand, Mr. Vern O'Brian, an expert from Australia proposed to change the name from a geographic division to a linguistics division as “Austronesia” Division of UNGEGN. Other members suggested to keep the geographic division as the “Asia, South-East and the Pacific” (delete the word south-west) or (Asia, south-east and Pacific, central-south), or just “Pacific Asia”. The Sixth Divisional Meeting Report was submitted at the Seventeenth Session of UNGEGN held in New York from 13-14

June 1994, as Working Paper no. 70, in which the name of “Austronesian” Division might be appropriate the cover the languages of Asia, South-East and Pacific, South-West.

- (c) The reasons of changing name of the division was presented in the respective Report of the Division: quote: *In considering languages in the majority of countries of South East Asia, north and east of Australia, the AUSTRONESIAN language family has been used as a name, which has also been called the Malayo-Polynesian family in most English dictionaries in Australia. It seems logical that a language group name of the major countries in the area – Austronesian – could also be applied to a Division of UNGEGN in this region, comprising the major group of countries and inclusive of Australia, which gains its name from TERRA AUSTRALIS applied by Mathew Flinders in 1814. The group also includes Melanesia, Micronesia and in the West: Indonesia, Malaysia, etc.* unquote.
- (d) The current name of **Asia, South-East and Pacific, South-West**, has already been used but historically, no UNCSGN Resolution addressed the existence of this Division.
- (e) In the final/closing report of the Seventeenth UNGEGN Session, item no. 233, stated the following statement, quote *The Secretary addressed the request of the Asia, South-East and Pacific, South-West Division to drop the word “South-West” from the name. This would be decided at the next session of UNGEGN*, unquote.
- (f) During the Eighteenth Divisional Meeting United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, Asia South-East and Pacific South-West attended by five (5) member countries from Philippine, Indonesia, Singapore, Brunei Darussalam and Malaysia which was held in Kuala Lumpur Malaysia on 22<sup>th</sup> February 2011, it was proposed that the Division should be split into two, namely Asia South-East Division (to include Sri Lanka and Bhutan) and Pacific South-West Division. This decision was taken in particular due to the long distance between the two regions therefore most of the Pacific South-West countries are unable to attend its annual meeting.
- (g) An informal meeting was held at the UN Vienna Office during the Twenty-Sixth Session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names on 4 May 2011 where six (6) member countries from Indonesia, Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, Sri Lanka and Malaysia attended this meeting which was chaired by Malaysia. The Meeting took the position that the membership of the Division could only be decided after obtaining the views of all member countries of the Division. This refers to the proposed resolution of the meeting in Kuala Lumpur to split the Division into two groups.
- (h) This matter was again raised at the recent Nineteenth Divisional Meeting United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, Asia South-East and Pacific South-West, which was held in Manila, Philippines on 28 February 2012. During the Nineteenth Meeting the five (5) attending member countries (Indonesia, Brunei Darussalam, Singapore, Malaysia and Philippine) agreed to split the division subject to the approval of the majority of the member countries. The meeting agreed to get the response from other member countries which had not attended the meeting. Should there be no response received from those countries by end of April 2012, then it can be considered as agreeable to the splitting of the Division.
- (i) Malaysia had written a letter to all member countries to vote for or against the proposal with a clause stating that **“Should there be no response received from any member countries by end**

*of April 2012, then it will be considered as agreeable to the splitting of the Division.”* Until the dateline only Vietnam and Papua New Guinea have responded and agreed to the proposal to split the Division into two.

- (j) This means that seven (7) countries had expressed their supports for the proposal. The other sixteen (15) countries have not responded on the proposal which when taken into account the said clause in the letter sent to these countries, will meant that they also agreed to the proposal.
- (k) With this outcome, this Division wish to present the proposal to split the Division into two (2) during this upcoming UNGEGN and UNCSGN for consideration and approval as follows;
  - i. Asia South-East Division which include member countries from Brunei Darussalam, Bhutan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippine, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam (12 countries).
  - ii. and Pacific South-West Division which include member countries from Australia, Fiji, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga and Vanuatu (10 countries).
- (l) In accordance to UNGEGN’s rule that a country shall decide for itself the division to which it wishes to belong and may be a member of another division provided the nature of its participation does not change the linguistic/geographical character of the division(s) concerned, member countries from this division including Bhutan (also member of India Division), Lao People's Democratic Republic (also member of French Speaking Division), Timor Leste (also member of Portuguese speaking division) and New Zealand (also member of United Kingdom Division) too become member of other divisions as well.
- (m) Currently this division with twenty two (22) member countries has the largest number of members compare to other divisions under UNGEGN. With the split of the division, decisions taken during the divisional meeting which on average attended by five (5) member countries, could be translated into actions since consultations and consensus would be easier and therefore faster. Currently, major decisions taken by attending member countries will have to refer to all 22 member countries for approval making it difficult and even impossible to implement. It is therefore believed that the split will give better impetus to the activities of geographic naming for all countries involved in both regions.
- (n) During the informal meeting held in United Nations office in Vienna on 4 May 2011, the Division agreed with the recommendation made by Ms. Helen Kerfoot, Chair of UNGEGN that in the event of the split, projects, including regional map and gazetteer should remain as joint project. The regional map and gazetteer will continuously be updated with the help of both Australia and New Zealand. The cooperation between these two regions will continue and perhaps will conduct joint meetings and trainings between the divisions.
- (o) During the Nineteenth Divisional Meeting in Manila on 28 February 2012, Indonesia has kindly accepted to take over the management of the Division website which is currently maintained by Australia if the split happened.