

**Twenty-seventh Session
New York, 30 July and 10 August 2012**

Item 3 of the Provisional Agenda

Reports of the working groups.

Report of the Working Group on Pronunciation*

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on Pronunciation**

Report of the Working Group on Pronunciation

The Working Group on Pronunciation was established on the recommendation of the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in Berlin in 2002. Resolution VIII/11 notes that a geographical name has both oral and written forms, and notes also that the transliteration of geographical names from the script of one language into another script, such as romanization, does not normally provide a guide to the correct pronunciation of such names by persons who are unacquainted with the source language.

Aims and Current Work Plan of the Working Group

The current work plan of the Working Group aims to further the inclusion of guides to the pronunciation of individual geographical names in national gazetteers and in web based geographical names applications, through the means of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and/or audio files. To this end, the Working Group will provide support for the collection of audio files for the UNGEGN Geographical Names Database and will cooperate with other UNGEGN working groups, those dealing with Romanization and with Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers in particular.

Meetings of the Working Group.

Three meetings of Working Group have been held since the Ninth Conference in 2007:

- A meeting of Working Group was held in Vienna, Austria, in May 2008 in conjunction with the GeoNames08 symposium, which was organised by Dutch- and German-speaking Division.
- A meeting was held in association with the 25th Session of United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) in Nairobi, Kenya, in May 2009.
- A meeting was held during the 26th Session of UNGEGN in Vienna in May in 2011.

A meeting of the Working Group will be held during the Tenth United Nations Conference in New York (31 July – 9 August 2012).

Topics addressed at meetings

a. Pronunciation of geographical names in national gazetteers

The Working Group has addressed the issue of written guides to the pronunciation of geographical names at its meetings and is of the view that the inclusion of pronunciation of individual geographical names in printed national gazetteers should be encouraged. It also recommends that the pronunciation of names should be presented in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) rather than by means of other, unscientific, written methods.

b. Pronunciation in digital audio files in web-based applications.

At its meeting in Vienna in 2008, the Working Group recognised that the use of audio files offers the most practical and efficient method for providing a guide to the pronunciation of individual geographical names for most users and that the UNGEGN

Geographical Names Database presented a template for the provision of audio pronunciation of geographical names at a national level. The Working Group supports the use of pronunciation audio files in all web based geographical names applications, including on-line national gazetteers and databases. The technology for the creation of audio files is widely available and inexpensive, and these files can be exported easily to other applications, including on-line maps (Google, Yahoo), and satellite navigation (Sat-Nav) systems.

At its meeting in Vienna in 2011, the Working Group once again expressed strong support for the use of audio files as the most practical means for providing instant and convenient access to the pronunciation of individual geographical names at a national level. The members were of the opinion that the presentation on “Sound files in the Placenames Database of Ireland” made by the Convenor of the Working Group at the 26th Session of UNGEGN provided broad guidelines for establishing best practice techniques for recording audio files and for making them available on the web.

Presentation: “Sound Files in the Placenames Database of Ireland”

The Convenor of the Working Group gave a Powerpoint presentation to the 26th Session of UNGEGN in Vienna (2-6 May 2011) on the inclusion of pronunciation sound files in the Placenames Database of Ireland, www.logainm.ie. The reason for the provision of sound files in the database was based on the view that, for many users, the pronunciation of a placename had become more important than its spelling, particularly in the broadcast media. He explained that the aims of the sound files were to provide the public with one pronunciation for each placename in both official languages, Irish and English, and that the sound files did not illustrate variations in pronunciation of individual names. The presentation touched on the categories of names recorded, the choice of speakers, work procedures and on certain technical aspects. A more detailed description of this project was presented in Working Paper No. 89, “The Audio Guide to the Pronunciation of Geographical Names in the Placenames Database of Ireland”, at the 25th Session of UNGEGN in Nairobi in 2009.