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**United Nations  
Group of Experts on  
Geographical Names**

**Working Paper  
No. 46**

**Twentieth Session  
New York, 17 – 28 January 2000**

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**Item 7  
of the Provisional Agenda**

**SUMMARY REPORTS OF THE WORKING GROUPS**

**Report of the Working Group on Gazetteers and Toponymic  
Data Files for the Period 1998-1999**

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**Prepared by Randall Flynn, Executive Secretary for Foreign Names, United States  
Board on Geographic Names**

Working Group on Gazetteers and Toponymic Data Files  
Provisional Report to the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names  
20<sup>th</sup> Session  
17 – 28 January 2000

### Working Group Membership

The following experts are members of the Working Group:

Mr. Milan Oroščen ADAMIČ, Slovenia  
Mrs. Caroline BURGESS, United Kingdom  
Mr. Traian CONSTANTINESCU, Romania  
Mr. Randall FLYNN, United States (convenor)  
Ms. Mária KOVÁČOVÁ, Slovakia  
Mr. Hamid MALMIRIAN, Iran  
Mr. Roger MARSDEN, United Kingdom  
Mr. Jorma MARTTINEN, Finland  
Mr. Peeter PALL, Estonia  
Mr. Juan QUÍNE Vigil, Peru  
Mr. Jörn SIEVERS, Germany  
Mr. Lou YOST, United States

### Terms of Reference

The Working Group was constituted in its present form during the nineteenth session of the United Nations Group of Experts with the subsuming of the Working Group on Toponymic Data Exchange Formats and Standards.

The Working Group generally endeavors to promote and further the aims of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names that relate to the collection and dissemination of geographic names information as stated in the first report of the Group of Experts in 1960:

“It is recommended that names authorities publish standardized names in gazetteer form as well as on maps since much information necessary for the proper understanding and interpretation of names cannot be included readily on maps.”

This seminal recommendation has been underscored and amplified in numerous resolutions of the various United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

### Work Plan

At the 19<sup>th</sup> session of UNGEGN in New York, January 1998, the Working Group established the following outline of objectives:

1. Establish a Working Group newsletter to document and distribute news of events and developments relating to gazetteers and toponymic information exchange.
2. Maintain and revise the information contained in *Report of the Working Group on Toponymic Data Exchange Formats and Standards to the Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names*.
3. Establish liaison with the Unicode Consortium to represent the needs of the geographic information community for digital text encoding in the context of geographic names.
4. Establish contact with relevant activities under the auspices of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) to influence the development of international standards for the exchange of toponymic information.
5. Promote the implementation of practical programs of toponymic data exchange.
6. Promote and conduct toponymic data exchange workshops to address issues associated with data exchange

**Progress Against the Work Plan Since the 19<sup>th</sup> Session of UNGEGN**  
The following points summarize activities occurring during 1998-1999:

**Objective 1 – Working Group Newsletter**  
No activity to date.

**Objective 2 – Maintain Report of the Working Group on Toponymic Data Exchange Formats and Standards ...**  
No revisions have been identified to date.

**Objective 3 – Liaison with the Unicode Consortium**  
The convenor of the Working Group prepared a paper and presentation covering the special needs for text encoding in digital geographic information systems to represent correctly spellings of geographic names. Mr. Fawaz Alami of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names staff presented the paper at the 13<sup>th</sup> International Unicode Conference in San Diego, California, September 8 – 11, 1998. The paper was published in the proceedings of the conference, and copies are available from the convenor.

**Objective 4 – Liaison with ISO**  
No activity to date.

**Objective 5 – Promote practical programs of data exchange**  
The report of the UNGEGN Working Group on Toponymic Data Exchange Formats and Standards has been applied in building new data sources on the Internet, e.g. there is a Letter Database (<http://www.eki.ee/letter/>) that displays languages, their special characters and Unicode codes together with images of the letters. It is maintained by the webmaster (Mr. Indrek Hein) at the Institute of Estonian Language. The report of the WG is mentioned as one of the sources.

**Objective 6 – Toponymic data exchange workshops**  
Under the auspices of the Alexandria Digital Library Project at the University of California, and funded by the National Science Foundation (United States), a two-day Digital Gazetteer Information Exchange Workshop was conducted at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, on October 13 – 14, 1998. Mr. MARSDEN of the Working Group participated in the workshop, along with several other United Nations experts. The Working Group convenor was a member of the workshop's steering committee, and made a presentation on toponymic authorities. Approximately 65 people attended the workshop representing the academic community, governmental and non-governmental organizations, and the private sector. Representatives from Australia, Canada, Honduras, and the United Kingdom attended; limitations in available space and funding prevented further international participation. The workshop provided an invaluable opportunity for participants to share issues, concerns, and experience in both the practical and theoretical aspects of toponymic data exchange. An expanded agenda for the workshop, including many of the presentations and concluding remarks, can be found at:

[http://www.alexandria.ucsb.edu/~lhill/dgie/DGIE\\_agenda5.html](http://www.alexandria.ucsb.edu/~lhill/dgie/DGIE_agenda5.html).