

UNSD Opening Address
UNGEGN International Course on Marine Toponymy
Dusit Thani, Manila, Philippines,
19 March 2018

Dr. Tiangco, Administrator, NAMRIA, Ms. Helen Kerfoot, honorary past president UNGEGN, special invited guests, resource persons, course participants, and staff of NAMRIA, a pleasant good morning.

It is a delight to be here with you for the next six days to share in the transfer of knowledge and expertise in the standardization of geographical names, and to also interact with you our participants from the Asia South East Division. Before I continue, I extend greetings on behalf of the Director of UNSD, Mr. Stefan Schweinfest. He has asked me to congratulate NAMRIA and members of the UNGEGN training committee for their exemplar collaboration in designing, planning and convening this training course. He has also asked me to convey the continued support of UNSD in advancing the principles of names standardization and the work done by UNGEGN. Stefan is a numbers person and I know he will be pleased to know of the record number of participants, which I understand is over 60.

It takes considerable resources to organize a course of this magnitude – this room, refreshments, resource persons, technical material, field exercise and your participation – all made possible through the collaborative works of many, so please help me in thanking NAMRIA and our UNGEGN experts for their exceptional dedication, professionalism and the time and resources spent in organizing this event.

To the participants, your very presence here signals the importance given to geographical names. Many of you may be aware that UNGEGN this year celebrated its 50th anniversary. This is a significant milestone of the group of experts, as it heralded not only its rich history and numerous achievements but also its push to create a modern and new UNGEGN. At its 11th conference and 30th session in August last year in New York, (some of you were there) a consensus based decision was taken to create a new efficient and agile body that retained its brand UNGEGN.

We are living in an era where change is constant and to keep relevant we have to adapt to changes. What are you doing at the divisional and national levels to effect change? My challenge to you this week is to reflect on your national names situation, review what you have learnt at the end of the week, to identify two ways in which you can effect positive changes in your national names standardization efforts. The change need not be great or requiring significant resources, it could be you becoming a geographical names ambassador – advocating the importance and benefits of names standardization, it could be about influencing and supporting the creation of a names bureau/committee, or changing the procedures in a names collection exercise.

As UNGEGN forges ahead there are a few challenges to be addressed. 1) the preparation of its new rules of procedure and agenda for its first meeting in 2009 – an exercise which is currently on-going, 2) to strengthen its communication and publicity efforts, to be able to inform its constituents, to empower them and convert more toponymists. 3) An aging bureau and working group conveners – the need for more experts to give of their time to continue the legacy of this distinguished and august expert body of the United Nations.

In closing I wish to recognize the UNGEGN training committee, they have planned a technically stimulating and rich week of lectures and activities, which I am sure you will enjoy. Wishing you a great and successful week on geographical names standardization.

Cecille Blake

UNSD, UNGEGN Secretariat