

Twenty-second Session
New York, 20-29 April 2004

Item 7 of the Provisional Agenda

SUMMARY REPORTS OF THE WORKING GROUPS

Report of the Working Group on Toponymic Data Files
and Gazetteers for the Period 2002-2004*

*Submitted by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names –
Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers

Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers
Twenty Second Session, United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names
New York, 20 – 29 April 2004

Working Group Membership

The following experts are members of the Working Group:

Mr. Milan Orožen ADAMIČ, Slovenia
Mrs. Caroline BURGESS, United Kingdom
Mr. Traian CONSTANTINESCU, Romania
Mr. Randall FLYNN, United States (convenor)
Ms. Mária KOVÁČOVÁ, Slovakia
Mr. Teemu LESKINEN, Finland
Mr. Hamid MALMIRIAN, Iran
Mr. Roger MARSDEN, United Kingdom
Mr. Jorma MARTTINEN, Finland
Mrs. Kathleen O'BRIEN, Canada
Mr. Peeter PÄLL, Estonia
Mr. Juan QUIÑE Vigil, Peru
Mr. Jörn SIEVERS, Germany
Ms. Vita STRAUTNIECE, Latvia
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 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 (UNCSGN).

Work Plan

At the 19th session of UNGEGN in New York, January 1998, the Working Group established the following outline of objectives (with modifications recommended at 8th UNCSGN in 2002):

1. Establish and maintain a Working Group web site 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 8th UNCSGN and 21st UNGEGN:

The following points summarize activities occurring during 2002-2004:

Objective 1 – Working Group Website

The Working Group continues to maintain a web site <<http://www.zrc-sazu.si/ungegn/>> that can effectively serve as the means for publicizing the Group's activities, meetings, and reports. The Working Group expresses its appreciation to Mr. ADAMIČ for his work in establishing the web site.

Objective 2 – Maintenance of the Report of the Working Group on Toponymic Data Exchange Formats and Standards (E/Conf.91/CRP.11 (7th UNCSGN))

In 2003, Working Group members Mrs. BURGESS and Mr. PÄLL undertook the task of reformatting and partially revising the Report as a contribution to the United Nations technical reference manual on toponymy. Their work in this regard is appreciated.

A more substantial revision/update of the report remains to be accomplished. As reported in 2002, this major revision to the report would update character inventories for Sámi and other languages, recompilation of the report using a single Unicode-enabled software application, a complete review and update of Annex A and Annex B of the report in comparison with the Version 4 of the Unicode Standard, and an elaboration of the skeleton for toponymic data exchange guidelines that was compiled as Annex C.

Objective 3 – Liaison with the Unicode Consortium

In June 2002 the Working Group collaborated with UNGEGN leadership and the UN Secretariat to establish formal liaison membership for UNGEGN with the Unicode Consortium. The Consortium consented to UNGEGN's request on 19 June 2002. No further substantive liaison between UNGEGN and the Unicode Consortium has taken place.

Objective 4 – Liaison with ISO

In the spring of 2002, the Working Group and UNGEGN leadership corresponded with the ISO Technical Committee (TC) 211 Secretariat, requesting for UNGEGN Category A liaison status with TC 211. The Technical Committee accepted the request at its May 2002 plenary meeting in Bangkok. No further substantive liaison between UNGEGN and ISO TC 211 has taken place.

At the 8th UNCSGN, the Working Group reported that it had participated in the work of ISO/TC 211 by conducting a review of the ISO Committee Draft Standard 19112 - "Spatial Referencing by Geographic Identifiers." ISO has not taken final action on this standard.

Objective 5 – Promote practical programs of data exchange

No activity during 2002-2004.

Objective 6 – Toponymic data exchange workshops

No activity during 2002-2004.

Meetings of the Working Group

There have been no meetings of the Working Group during 2002-2004.

Future Business

There is activity, proposed at the 8th UNCSGN but to date unaccomplished, that requires the Working Group's attention.

The Report of the Working Group on Toponymic Data Exchange Formats and Standards (E/Conf.91/CRP.11 (7th UNCSGN)) remains in obvious need of revision. It is apparent that this task can only be accomplished through a collaborative arrangement among Working Group members.

That ISO/TC 211/TC 211 has not taken final action on Committee Draft Standard 19112 is an indication that the Technical Committee would benefit from the expertise of UNGEGN and the Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers. A more active liaison between the Working Group and TC 211 is envisaged.