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United Nations Experts Meet in Vienna to Encourage More Accurate Use of Place Names

VIENNA, 27 March (UN Information Service) -- The development of more consistent and accurate place names, which can impact on the speed of delivery of assistance in natural disasters or humanitarian crises, will be discussed by an estimated 200 experts from around the world at a meeting in Vienna this week.

The experts, who represent 22 linguistic or geographical divisions around the world, are members of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), which is holding its 23rd session in Vienna from 28 March – 4 April 2006. The experts will discuss ways to increase consistency and accuracy in the use of place names. They will also consider how to standardize written forms of geographical names, including measures on how to Romanize place names being converted from languages which use non-Roman script.

The UNGEGN is one of seven standing expert bodies of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It was established more than 40 years ago to increase the standardization of geographical names, which in turn assists more effective communication worldwide. Consistent place names benefit local, national and international communities involved in the development of activities such as mapping, urban and regional planning, peacekeeping, navigation, trade, cultural heritage and emergency preparedness.

Accurate geographical data is important particularly in times of crises and can affect the speed at which assistance is delivered to areas affected by natural disasters or humanitarian crises. "The need for swift global responses to various crises in recent times has underlined the importance of clear geographical names for use in very practical situations," said the UNGEGN Chairperson, Helen Kerfoot. "We have enormous opportunities to be of assistance in helping to provide easily retrievable, accurate and up-to-date information on place names."

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