

**Twenty-ninth session
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Item 2 of the provisional agenda

Report of the Chair

Report of the Chairperson *

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Summary

This report summarizes the efforts across the world to meet the ever increasing need for accurate and comprehensive place names data.

UNGEGN – mandate and need

Let us for a moment consider the UNGEGN Mandate.

- To provide encouragement and guidance to those nations which have no national organization for the standardization and co-ordination of geographical names to establish such an organization and to produce national gazetteers at an early date;
- To take the necessary steps to ensure the following central clearing-house functions for geographical names:
 - Collection of gazetteers and information concerning the technical procedures that each Member State has adopted for standardization of domestic names.
 - Collection of information on the techniques and systems used by each Member State in the transliteration of the geographical names of other countries;
 - Dissemination to Member States and, upon request, to any working groups established on a common linguistic basis, of all documents and information collected, utilizing existing United Nations periodicals where ever feasible;
- To set up a small group of consultants chosen, with due regard to equitable geographic distribution and to the different linguistic systems of the world, from those countries having widest experience of the problems of geographical names:
 - To consider the technical problems of domestic standardization of geographical names, including the preparation of a statement of the general and regional problems involved, and to prepare draft recommendations for the procedures, principally linguistic, that might be followed in the standardization of their own names by individual countries;
 - To report to the Council at an appropriate session, in the light of its discussion on the above points, on the desirability of holding an international conference on this subject and of the sponsoring of working groups based on common linguistic systems;
- To invite Governments of countries interested and experienced in the question to make available, at his request and at their own expense, consultants to serve on the above group.

This mandate is quite broad in its scope and does cover what we do. However, it has been in its current form for a number of years and it may be time for use collectively to review its content and determine if any alteration, additions or deletions are recommended. If this is the case, we will have an opportunity at the next conference to have consider any resolutions that may be necessary to effect a change.

The mandate needs to be inclusive enough to cover the issues we are dealing with now but not too expansive or in any way restrictive.

UNGEGN - support

The work of UNGEGN cannot be done without significant support from the following areas.

UN Statistical Division

We cannot overlook this support, as it is through this organization that we gain the funding needed to meet, to publish and to train. Without this we would not have the training manuals, the web based information and support and the secretariat who labour extensively on our behalf, particularly as we approach the sessions and conferences.

I would like to express our thanks to Mr. Stefan Schweinfest, Director of the Statistics Division and express our hope that this level of support will continue.

In order for the framework provided by the Statistical Division to be effective, can I remind all delegated that there is input required for data for:

- UNGEGN World Geographical Names web-based database
- Division / Working Group and Country contact details
- Input into the quarterly bulletins

UNGEGN Secretariat

As in the past, the value of support given by the Secretariat is invaluable to us. Ms Cecille Blake and Ms Vilma Frani continue to work on our behalf and as well as providing the organization skills, they are also providing other ideas and improvements to the way we undertake our communication and structures.

For example, it was the secretariat that came up with the idea of a thematic approach to our bulletins and this has provided a richer content to this quarterly publication.

UNGEGN Working Groups

There are two frameworks that enable the work of UNGEGN to be effective, the first is the working groups, covering the thematic issues that we need constant activity.

With these groups we also have the Task Team for Africa and the group working with Toponymic Guidelines for Map and Other Editors.

Each group needs to attract membership to function effectively and I encourage as many delegates as possible to become involved in the working groups as this involvement and sharing of ideas and problems will contribute significantly to the final outcomes.

The work undertaken in each group will be covered in the relevant sections of the session over the next few days and I will encourage the conveners to promote the past accomplishments and the future goals and work plans.

UNGEGN Divisions

In a similar manner the divisions provide the specific focus that can enable the resolutions and direction of UNGEGN to be applied effectively in the geographic or language space represented.

Again, as I read about, hear of and, on occasions, participate in, activities of the divisions, I am grateful for the work undertaken by those involved.

Like the working groups, I cannot over stress the importance of the divisional structure in achieving the desired outcomes. And encourage countries to be involved. I recognise that there are ever increasing cost and work load pressures on all of us, but still encourage involvement. We will have to look at alternative methods for divisional communication, but we have good support through development in communication technology that I am sure will provide some assistance.

I look forward to hearing how this technology is applied in the various divisions.

Member Countries

At the very base of the UNGEGN structure are the member countries. Without this foundation, we would not exist. As I read about the activities and the initiatives undertaken I am able to further my own insight and knowledge and learn of solutions and methods I can apply to the jurisdiction I am associated with.

The existence of a functioning place names authority in each country is one of the fundamental aspects of the UNGEGN mandate and all that we do and produce is to this end. There are still countries that, to the best of our knowledge, do not have such an authority and others where it is not functioning.

UNGEKN – future

UNGEKN has a long history of accomplishment, one that the delegates can be proud to be associated with. We need to recognise that efforts that have been made in the last 57 years by past and present delegates to place us in the position we are in now.

The future of UNGEGN is now in our hands and we are in a time of incredibly rapid technical development and also in a time of resource pressures. How we react to these will determine the future of UNGEGN.

At a recent meeting of the Working group on Evaluation and Implementation, the current working methodology of UNGEGN was reviewed and some ideas and thoughts have been compiled in the paper I will present next. This is a paper for consideration only at this time, and whereas we can discuss the concepts, no decisions need to be made at this time as this will be a subject for greater consideration at the conference next year.

We also need to be increasingly aware that the upsurge in spatial data use means we need to develop and strengthen relationships with other organisations working in this space. We have strong relationships with bodies such as the International Hydrographic Organization, the International Council of Onomastic Sciences, the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research and the International Cartographic Association and this has been of benefit to all parties. These relationships need to be maintained or strengthened.

We do have a need to better the relationship with UNGGIM. This body is creating a strategic position for the use of spatial data for sustainable development and humanitarian relief efforts and also considering how statistical information can be incorporated into spatial information systems. Obviously, place names will play a significant part in these goals and we need to be aware of the strategic requirements that are set and ensure the UNGGIM is understanding of the issues we face. The opportunity to develop a strong synergistic relationship that will benefit both parties is worth taking.

Conclusion

I am looking forward to the proceedings of this UNGEGN session, renewing friendships and meeting the new delegates. If I can assist in any way, please feel free to approach

me. I look forward the learning experience that will be available to me in the coming days.

Bill Watt
Adelaide, South Australia

Annex 1

Creation of UNGEGN Divisions

At the Second UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names held in London in 1972, with resolution II/3, UNGEGN was formally created under its current name, rather than continuing as an ad hoc group.

At that time (II/4), 14 geographical/linguistic divisions were formed. Several of the original names have since been changed and one division (Africa south of the Sahara) was disbanded in favour of smaller regional groupings. Since 1975, ten other divisions have been constituted.

Chronological list:

1972 2nd Conference II/4	Africa south of the Sahara Arabic Asia, east Asia, south-east Asia, south-west, other than Arabic Dutch-speaking and German-speaking Europe, east central and south-east Indian group Latin America Norden Romance languages, other than Latin America United Kingdom group Union of Soviet Socialist Republics United States of America – Canada
1975 6th UNGEGN	China
1978 3rd Conference III/26	Africa south of the Sahara be subdivided into three: Africa, Central Africa, East Africa, West
1987 5th Conference V/3	Celtic East Mediterranean (other than Arabic)
1992 6th Conference VI/1	Africa South Baltic Eastern Europe, Northern and Central Asia The Division referred to as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics ceased to exist
1998 7th Conference VII/1	French-speaking
2007 9th Conference IX/3	Portuguese-speaking
2012 10th Conference X/5	Asia South-East Pacific South West Division split into Asia South-East Pacific South West

Alphabetic list by name, as currently used

Africa Central 1978 (from 1972 part of Africa south of the Sahara)
Africa East 1978 (from 1972 part of Africa south of the Sahara)
Africa South 1992 (from 1972-1978, part of Africa south of the Sahara)
Africa West 1978 (from 1972 part of Africa south of the Sahara)
Arabic 1972
Asia East (other than China) 1972 (originally Asia, east)
Asia South-East 2012 (originally Asia, south-east, then portion of Asia South East pacific South West)
Asia South-West (other than Arabic) 1972
Baltic 1992
Celtic 1987
China 1975
Dutch- and German-speaking 1972
East Central and South-East Europe 1972
Eastern Europe, Northern and Central Asia (from 1972, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics 1992 Division existed)
East Mediterranean (other than Arabic) 1987
French-speaking 1998
India 1972
Latin America 1972
Norden 1972
Pacific South-West 2012 (formerly portion of the Asia South East Pacific South West)
Portuguese-speaking 2007
Romano-Hellenic 1972 (originally Romance languages, other than Latin America)
United Kingdom 1972
United States of America / Canada 1972