



Press Release

STAT/443

Department of Public Information • News and Media Division • New York

NINTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES CONCLUDES IN NEW YORK

NEW YORK, 31 August (United Nations Statistics Division) — At the Ninth Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, held at United Nations Headquarters from 21-30 August, over 300 delegates from 91 countries met to discuss geographical names standards designed to promote the consistent and accurate use of place names.

Geographical names are more than just place names on the map. They are an indispensable locational component of any spatially organized information system. They help enable the integration of digital data sets, which become essential and powerful decision-making tools for policymakers and managers, and aid cooperation among local, national and international organizations.

Since the Eighth Conference held in Berlin in 2002, there have been two sessions of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), which was established in the 1960s to further the national standardization of geographical names and promote the national and international benefits to be derived from standardization. Between sessions much of the ongoing work has been carried forward by the 22 geographical/linguistic divisions and the 10 working groups of UNGEGN.

“The past five years have certainly brought accelerated growth in digital aspects of geographical names standardization, as well as in communication of the names information around the world,” said Helen Kerfoot, Chairperson of UNGEGN, which met on 20 and 31 August, immediately before and after the Conference. She went on to say, “Much has been accomplished in different parts of the world in the past five years, but clearly much remains to be done in the field of geographical names standardization.”

The Conference heard special presentations from representatives of the United Nations, the World Health Organization and Google Earth, whose need for consistent names data was vital to the provision of timely humanitarian relief, to political and administrative decision-making at the provincial and district level and to the provision of up-to-date information linked with satellite imagery presented on the World Wide Web.

A total of 250 papers were presented on a wide variety of topics ranging from the creation of national names authorities and the development of national gazetteers to activity in relation to the handling of names in different writing systems, the production of national toponymic guidelines and the safeguarding of names as part of a nation's cultural heritage.

A new *Technical reference manual for the standardization of geographical names*, compiled by three UNGEGN working groups and published by the Statistics Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, was launched along with a prototype global database aimed at disseminating names of countries and major cities in the world with a population of more than 100,000.

Looking to the future, the Conference passed 11 resolutions, amongst which were resolutions to create a Portuguese-speaking Division in UNGEGN, to promote the recording and use of indigenous, minority and regional language group geographical names, to sustain support for participation in toponymic training courses and to hold the twenty-fifth session of UNGEGN in Africa in 2009.

Further information on the Conference and the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names can be found at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/>.

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