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**NINTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES, AIMED
AT ENSURING ACCURATE USE OF NAMES IN COMMUNICATION, OPENS IN NEW YORK 21 AUGUST**

NEW YORK, 17 August (United Nations Statistics Division) -- Worldwide geographical names standards designed to promote the consistent and accurate use of names are important in meeting the everyday needs of international, national and regional communication, whether it be in the service of commerce, transport and administration or international relations and the provision of humanitarian aid.

At the ninth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, which opens on 21 August at United Nations Headquarters in New York, nearly 300 experts from 100 countries will gather for 10 days to discuss key issues and technical aspects of promoting and providing accuracy and consistency in the use of place names.

The need for reliable, authoritative and accessible geographical names data provides "great opportunities, but for most, also many challenges and issues", recognizes Helen Kerfoot, Chairperson of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), which will meet on 20 and 31 August, immediately before and after the Conference.

In addition to addressing the technical problems involved in the standardization of geographical names and drafting recommendations for procedures to be followed, experts will discuss ways of promoting the use of more accurate names on the Internet and assisting developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where standardization of place names is crucial in advancing economic development and in the fight against poverty.

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, will be launched at the Conference, along with a prototype global database, which initially aims to collect, manage and disseminate names of countries and major cities in the world with a population of more than 100,000.

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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