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Toponymic Terminology (Working Group on Toponymic Terminology)

Report of the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology 2017-2019

Submitted by the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology **

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** Prepared by Trent Palmer, Convenor, Working Group on Toponymic Terminology

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Background

The Working Group on Toponymic Terminology was established by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) at its 14th session in Geneva in May 1989. The main tasks of the group were to produce a new glossary of toponymic terminology and to periodically review and update the glossary. A first glossary was completed in 1984, with revisions in 1986 and 1987. In 2002 the Glossary of Terms for the Standardization of Geographical Names (edited by Naftali Kadmon, Israel), including 375 terms and their definitions in the six official UN languages, was published in one combined volume with appropriate cross-referencing. In resolution VIII/3 (2002) the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN) recognized that “terminology is not at a standstill, and that future developments will require additions and/or amendments to the definitions of terms”, and recommended that the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology continue to function. At the ninth UNCSGN in New York (2007) an Addendum with a total of 23 entries were ratified and approved for insertion in the Glossary. 12 of these were terms already in the Glossary whose definitions had been amended, and the other 11 were new terms not included in the 2002 Glossary. The revised Glossary (that includes the Addendum as a separate Annex) is available for download from the UNGEGN website (on the UNGEGN Publications page).

Recent Developments

Recommendations for changes to the glossary have been submitted in the years since 2007. However, focus turned to the creation of a database of toponymic terminology. The working group was less active in these years, but typically met in conjunction with UNGEGN sessions and the former Conferences. There was also a WG meeting in 2013 in Corfu at which agreement was reached on two terminology changes (‘onomastics’ and ‘settlement name’).

In 2017, Trent Palmer (United States) became the Convenor of the Working Group. A docket of proposed changes to the glossary has been provided to the group to review. The docket contains more than 100 terms subject to a range of actions (addition to glossary, edit definition, delete from glossary, etc.). There remain additional proposals submitted in recent sessions and Conferences that require review.

The Working Group is happy to report progress on the development of the glossary database. After some beta work in the early years provided by Dr. Peder Gammeltoft (formerly of Denmark; now Norway). The data (reflecting the 2002 published Glossary) was passed along to Dr. Gerhard Rampl (Austria) who has graciously re-established the database at the University of Innsbruck (www.ortsnamen.at/ungegn_glossary). The database will be updated to contain the 2007 Addendum once difficulties with the Arabic text can be resolved. From that point on, changes approved in 2013 and subsequently by the working group will be added.

Upcoming Actions for 2019 – 2021

- The Working Group will reach agreement on the docket of proposals for the glossary submitted since the 2007 update
- The Working Group will ensure that the online database reflects the 2007 glossary update. Once done, ensure the online database is routinely updated to reflect recent decisions
- The Working Group will address new glossary proposals, as required
- The Working Group will explore options for establishing a working group website