

31 July 2012



Press Release

STAT/446

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

TENTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES, AIMED

AT ENSURING ACCURATE USE OF NAMES IN COMMUNICATION, OPENS IN NEW YORK

NEW YORK, 31 July, (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, search and rescue and the provision of humanitarian aid.

At the tenth United National Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, which opens on 31 July at United Nations Headquarters in New York, experts from around the world will gather for eight days to discuss key issues relating to the handling of place names.

At United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names, which have been held every five years since 1967, resolutions on technical issues are passed and endorsed by the United Nations Economic and Social Council. These issues address aspects of the technical, economic, social and cultural benefits of national names standardization, providing guidelines and frameworks for international and regional activities, which range from the development of national names authorities and geographical names databases to the promotion of indigenous and minority geographical names.

While the tenth Conference will continue to discuss many issues relating to the collection, processing, storage, distribution and use of names addressed at the first Conference 45 years ago, the emphasis today will be on how best to use new technical tools to cope with an ever increasing need for accurate data delivered in a timely way, and the vast amount of volunteer digital information now available. The challenge is to “see how we can best embrace this data to everyone’s advantage”, recognizes Helen Kerfoot, Chairperson of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, which will meet on 30 July and 10 August, immediately before and after the Conference.

Since the ninth Conference was held in 2007, the Group of Experts has convened two sessions, in Nairobi and Vienna. Between these sessions, ongoing work has been undertaken by Member States, 23 geographical/linguistic divisions, 10 working groups, a task team for Africa and a coordinating group for toponymic guidelines. Achievements have included the development of a training course on the web, the publication of a media kit, the further development of the Expert Group’s World Geographical Names Database and the promotion of a greater awareness of the need for geographical names standardization in Africa.

Papers will be presented at the tenth Conference on subjects ranging from reports on database developments to name changes prompted by the Arab Spring. Resolutions will be proposed on aspects of geographical names standardization, such as the implementation of new Romanization systems, and a number of special presentations will be made by United Nations groups who are users of names data.

For further information on the Conference and the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, please access the website <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo> or e-mail geoinfo_unsd@un.org.

* * * * *

For information media • not an official record