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TENTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

CONCLUDES AT NEW YORK HEADQUARTERS

NEW YORK, 10 August (United Nations Statistics Division) – At the Tenth Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, held at United Nations Headquarters from 31 July-10 August, more than 150 delegates met to discuss standardization of geographical names and to promote their consistent and accurate use.

As stressed throughout the Conference, geographical names are not only an indispensable part of everyday life, they are also central to the administration of any nation and their delivery of services to the public. Geographical names are essential in decision-making for the public and private sphere alike – and aid cooperation among local, national and international organizations.

Since the Ninth Conference, held in New York in 2007, sessions have been held in Nairobi (2009) and Vienna (2011) by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), which was established in the 1960s to promote national and international standardization. Between sessions, much of the ongoing work has been carried out by the 23 geographical/linguistic divisions and the 10 working groups of UNGEGN.

“The past five years have seen accelerated growth in digital aspects of geographical names standardization, as well as in communication of name information around the world,” said Botolv Helleland, President of the Tenth Conference, immediately before it started. “Much has been accomplished in different parts of the world since the last Conference, but clearly much remains to be done in the field of geographical names standardization, particularly in Africa.” Through regional cooperation by Divisions, he said, it was to be hoped that such countries would make faster progress. “The growing acknowledgement of geographical names as part of a nation’s intangible cultural heritage might also add to the activity in geographical names standardization.”

The Conference heard special presentations by representatives of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa; the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; the National Geospatial Agency of Indonesia; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; the United Nations Statistics Division (on United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management); National Geographic Information Geoscience Australia; and the United Nations Cartographic Section, whose need for consistent names data was vital to political and administrative decision-making, to the provision of timely humanitarian relief, and to securing the survival of intangible cultural heritage.

Almost 200 papers were presented on a wide variety of topics, ranging from the creation of national names authorities, the promotion of national names standardization legislation, and the development of national and international geospatial systems, to the handling of names in different writing systems, the production of national toponymic guidelines and the safeguarding of names as part of cultural heritage.

Looking to the future, the Conference passed 12 resolutions, among which were texts on creating criteria for the establishment and evaluation of the cultural heritage nature of geographical names, discouraging the commercialization of geographical names, romanizing the systems of

several non-roman scripts and holding the 2014 twenty-eighth session of UNGEGN in Asia.

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/>, and at the UNGEGN Secretariat (United Nations Statistics Division) website geoinfo_unsd@un.org.

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