

**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL**

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**Tenth United Nations Conference on the  
Standardization of Geographical Names**

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Item 13(d) of the provisional agenda\*

**Writing systems and pronunciation:**

**Pronunciation**

**Report of the Working Group on Pronunciation**

Submitted by the Working Group on Pronunciation \*\*

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\*\* Prepared by Dónall Mac Giolla Easpaig (Ireland), Convenor, Working Group on Pronunciation.

## **Report of the Working Group on Pronunciation**

The Working Group on Pronunciation was established on the recommendation of the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in Berlin in 2002. Resolution VIII/11 notes that a geographical name has both both oral and written forms, and notes also that the transliteration of geographical names from the script of one language into another script, such as romanization, does not normally provide a guide to the correct pronunciation of such names by persons who are unacquainted with the source language.

### **Aims and Current Work Plan of the Working Group**

The current work plan of the Working Group aims to further the inclusion of guides to the pronunciation of individual geographical names in national gazetteers and in web based geographical names applications, through the means of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and/or audio files. To this end, the Working Group will provide support for the collection of audio files for the UNGEGN Geographical Names Database and will cooperate with other UNGEGN working groups, those dealing with Romanization and with Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers in particular.

### **Meetings of the Working Group.**

Three meetings of Working Group have been held since the Ninth Conference in 2007:

- A meeting of Working Group was held in Vienna, Austria, in May 2008 in conjunction with the GeoNames08 symposium, which was organised by Dutch- and German-speaking Division.
- A meeting was held in association with the 25th Session of United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) in Nairobi, Kenya, in May 2009.
- A meeting was held during the 26<sup>th</sup> Session of UNGEGN in Vienna in May in 2011.

A meeting of the Working Group will be held during the Tenth United Nations Conference in New York

### **Topics addressed at meetings**

#### **a. Pronunciation of geographical names in national gazetteers**

The Working Group has addressed the issue of written guides to the pronunciation of geographical names at its meetings and is of the view that the inclusion of pronunciation of individual geographical names in printed national gazetteers should be encouraged. It also recommends that the pronunciation of names should be presented in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) rather than by means of other, unscientific, written methods.

#### **b. Pronunciation in digital audio files in web-based applications.**

At its meeting in Vienna in 2008, the Working Group recognised that the use of audio files offers the most practical and efficient method for providing a guide to the pronunciation of individual geographical names for most users and that the UNGEGN Geographical Names Database presented a template for the provision of audio pronunciation of geographical names at a national level. The Working Group supports the use of pronunciation audio files in all web based geographical names applications, including on-line national gazetteers and databases. The technology for the creation of audio files is widely available and inexpensive and these files can be exported easily to other applications, including on-line maps (Google, Yahoo), and satellite navigation (Sat-Nav) systems.

At its meeting in Vienna in 2011, the Working Group once again expressed strong support for the use of audio files as the most practical means for providing instant and convenient access to the pronunciation of individual geographical names at a national level. The members were of the opinion that the presentation on “Sound files in the Placenames Database of Ireland” made by the Convenor of the Working Group at the 26<sup>th</sup> Session of UNGEGN provided broad guidelines for establishing best practice techniques for recording audio files and for making them available on the web.

### **Future work programme of the Working Group**

In the document (E./CONF.94/CRP.89) that first proposed the establishment of a working group on the pronunciation of geographical names at the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (Berlin, 2002) there is a supposition that the projected guides to pronunciation would be in written format. That same document actually prescribes a system of pronunciation tables or guides of various levels of complexity to address the subject. The notion that pronunciation might be presented by audio means is not alluded to. However, advances in information technology in the intervening decade provide the opportunity to progress the aims of the Working Group on Pronunciation through the provision of web based audio guides to pronunciation of geographical names. The provision of such guides, as with other aspects of geographical names, can only of be undertaken at a national level. The role of the Working Group into the future will be to encourage the creation of audio pronunciation guides to geographical names at a national level, to provide advice on the matter, and to maintain a register of national pronunciation guides on the UNGEGN web site.