

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

7 August 2012

---

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

New York, 31 July – 9 August 2012

Item 4 of the provisional agenda\*

**Reports by Governments on the situation in their countries and on the progress  
made in the standardization of geographical names since the Ninth Conference  
(for distribution only).**

A concise overview and synthesis of the information contained in the  
country reports submitted to the Tenth United Nations Conference  
on the Standardization of Geographical Names

Submitted on behalf of UNGEGN\*\*

---

\* E/CONF.101/1.

\*\* Submitted on behalf of UNGEGN, prepared by Mrs Caroline Burgess (United Kingdom)

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

**New York, 31 July - 9 August 2012**

**Item 4 of the Provisional Agenda: *Reports by Governments on the situation in their countries and on the progress made in the standardization of geographical names since the Ninth Conference.***

### **Introduction**

This overview summarises the information contained in the 41 reports submitted under Item 4 of the Provisional Agenda of the Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names: *Reports by Governments on the situation in their countries and on the progress made in the standardization of geographical names since the Ninth Conference.* The purpose of this synthesis is to highlight the salient factors of these reports which have been filed for information rather than presentation, to assess common themes, and to draw out both achievements and challenges. Papers consulted are listed in the Annex to this paper and include only those submitted at the time of writing this report (13<sup>th</sup> July 2012). All reports are available for consultation at:

<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/ungegnConf10.html>

Further papers (13) were subsequently received and are included in the list at the Annex (Conference Room Papers No. 9, 10, 14, 20, 23, 25, 28, 29, 31, 33, 34/Rev.1, 35 and 36); they are not analysed in this summary.

### **Structure and content of national reports**

A variety of approaches towards the presentation of national reports has been taken. Papers vary considerably in length from a few paragraphs to many pages. A few contain an outline of a country's entire activities, with more details about each activity to be found in other papers under other agenda items. In several instances a country has not submitted a country report at all, preferring instead to separate out all its information into one or more papers under different and more specific agenda items (eg Bulgaria, France). Occasionally, agenda item 9, National Standardization, has provided the opportunity to convey more detailed information that could also have been covered in a country report. However, agenda item 11, Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers, stands out as the primary alternative for the relay of information on national digital names work. For most countries, however, the national report is their only submission and therefore information on national toponymic work has been detailed in a single paper under this agenda item. Almost all countries have supplied a summary (sometimes this is the same as the full paper), but otherwise, there is little commonality of presentation. The Netherlands and Austria, for example, follow UNGEGN Dutch- and German-Speaking Division practice in using Resolutions as the framework for their papers; Croatia, Poland and Slovenia base their reports on Conference agenda items, whilst Canada, Germany, Kenya and New Zealand all organise their information according to the requirements set out in the Documentation for the Conference. Background information is provided by a few countries, some in more detail than others, but it is a discussion of goals and national programmes that provides the central focus of all reports and makes up the bulk of this synthesis. About a quarter of the reports draw out problems, solutions and achievements and propose conclusions and recommendations, but in the main these are included as an integral part of the overall text. A number of common topics have arisen from the reports and these are described below.

### National and sub-national names standardisation bodies and relevant legislation

Almost all reports provide an outline of national names authorities or describe the state organs responsible for managing geographical names information. Some countries give more detail about the composition and responsibilities of their names authorities (eg Australia, Canada, Estonia, Germany, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Kenya, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden.) New authorities established since the Ninth Conference include the Faroese Place-Name Commission reported by Denmark, and a Committee set up by the Palestinian National Authority. In Brazil, the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics set up the Reference Center on Geographic Names (CRNG) in 2007. Sri Lanka notes that approval in principle has been granted by the Cabinet of Ministers to establish a Committee for the Standardization of Geographical Names and staffing procedures are taking place. In Madagascar, however, a lack of funds has halted the work of the National Committee on Geographical Names and related work is instead being carried out by the National Cartographic and Hydrographic Institute. Some countries express a desire to set up a national names committee and examine the way forward (eg Senegal, Suriname, Vietnam). In some cases, legislation has been adopted giving existing state organisations responsibility for geographical names standardisation, for example in Italy where the Commission for Italian Official Toponymy has been set up under the Italian Military Geographical Institute. In Finland, the Institute for the Languages of Finland acts as the authoritative and co-ordinating body for the standardisation of names. Cameroon reports that its National Commission on Toponymy has not been able to function and instead geographical names work is in effect being carried out by other state organs, although reactivation of its Commission has recently been requested. Burkina Faso describes a similar scenario and notes that its Geographical Institute is taking steps to reinvigorate its names committee; the way forward is described in the national report and the composition of the revitalised committee is examined.

Legislation supporting geographical names activities is also frequently detailed in the reports (eg Croatia, Egypt, Estonia, Jordan, Latvia, Lithuania, Mongolia, New Zealand, Russian Federation, Poland, Spain and Ukraine), and recent amendments specified. Tunisia notes that a decree for the creation of a National Toponymic Committee is in the process of being approved. In Mexico there is no national names authority, but a Law on the National System of Statistical and Geographical Information passed in 2008 recognised geographical names as part of the national subsystem of geographical and environmental information. Japan reports that its names standardisation processes are well-developed and co-ordinated. In some countries, there is also an organisation dealing with names beyond the national boundaries, eg. in Poland, and also in the United Kingdom where the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names advises on foreign names for official use.

### Information on internal administrative division structures

Some reports give an account of the internal administrative structures (eg Jamaica, Senegal). Estonia notes that sometimes merging municipalities look to the Place Names Board for advice on naming.

### Multi-lingual areas and minority names and languages

The role and treatment of minority-language names or names in multi-lingual areas are covered by the reports of Croatia, Estonia, Germany, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Also, Poland details legislation allowing the use of 14 minority languages as a “supporting language” in relevant areas as well as the additional use of names in those languages; Austria notes the increase in the number of official bilingual names in Carinthia.

### Support to divisions and international programmes

Among the activities described is involvement in the UNGEGN Division or Divisions of which the country is a member (eg Austria, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Croatia, Egypt, Estonia, Germany, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Latvia, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Russian Federation, Ukraine and Vietnam). International collaboration and participation in international geographical names seminars and events are mentioned in the reports of Burkina Faso, Egypt, Canada, Indonesia, Jordan, Mongolia, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Tunisia. Work to support global or regional databases is also described. In particular, reports focussing on contributions to the EuroGeoNames programme include that of Croatia, Germany, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands and Slovenia. The UNGEGN World Geographical Names Database is also mentioned by eg Brazil and Egypt. Senegal is looking to the Task Team for Africa to assist in its establishment of a national names body.

### Toponymic training and promotion of geographical names

Internal training, awareness-raising initiatives and workshops at the national level are mentioned in the reports of Denmark, Estonia, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Latvia, Malaysia and Sweden. Vietnam notes the success of its training at both central and provincial levels. Finland has been involved in a number of symposia related to toponyms. Malaysia describes the creation of a Computer Based Training Course to highlight the significance of geographical naming. Kenya examines ways to introduce toponymic training alongside its surveying and mapping courses. Participation in international training is described by Brazil, Germany, and the Netherlands. A potential candidate for a future toponymic training course is Madagascar. Cameroon describes the UNGEGN Africa Central Division training workshop in Yaoundé in 2010 and attaches a report of the session. Various efforts to promote the importance of geographical names have been carried out: Denmark reports on events that marked the centenary in 2010 of the Danish Place-Name Commission, and one of the key tasks of the Committee for Geographical Names of Australasia is to promote greater awareness of geographical names issues. Austria, Finland, Italy and Sweden all note the publication of a number of documents and articles.

### Cultural heritage and preservation of historical names

Collecting and preserving geographical names as part of the intangible cultural and historical heritage is mentioned in the reports submitted by Australia, Estonia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Netherlands, Suriname, Sweden, and the Palestinian National Authority. Mongolia's report notes measures put in place to protect geographical names, including field surveys during the 1980s. One of the fundamental tasks of the New Zealand Geographic Board is to support the preservation of heritage and culture.

### Field collection

Collecting geographical names from the ground continues to be a significant task. The reports of Australia, Finland, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mongolia, Slovenia and the United Kingdom all mention field collection or ways of harvesting toponymic information; Sweden has designed a method of obtaining crowd-sourced data through mobile phone technology. Conversely, Latvia notes that decreasing resources have hampered its field collection projects.

### Production of toponymic material and related mapping programmes

New or updated Toponymic Guidelines that have been published in the past five years or are in work include those for Austria, Finland, Germany, Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and Ukraine.

The publication and updating of topographic mapping and atlases is inevitably linked to national geographical names work and is therefore described in many of the papers eg. Canada, Estonia, Finland, Islamic Republic of Iran, Jamaica, Latvia, Mexico, Mongolia, Senegal, Sri Lanka and Ukraine. The Russian Federation describes, *inter alia*, its recently-published four-volume *National Atlas of Russia*, and the Republic of Korea highlights several National Geographic Information Institute publications, including its *National Atlas of Korea* which contains a comprehensive English gazetteer. Estonia also mentions its air navigation and nautical charts and Japan notes that it produced an updated version of its *Gazetteer of Japan* in 2007. The collection of address and street-name data is also emerging as a prominent part of national mapping projects.

A German Glossary of Toponymic Terminology was published in 2010; Brazil has produced a concise Portuguese glossary, as well as a glossary of generic terminology used on its 1:1,000,000-scale mapping.

#### Toponymic databases, Gazetteers and National Data Infrastructures

These are common themes in many reports and there is a growing trend towards the linking of names to objects in topographic databases. The creation, maintenance, and updating of databases and gazetteers, or lists of standardised names, are reported by, for example, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Madagascar, Poland, Slovenia, Spain and Vietnam. In the United Kingdom a new Geospatial Data Management System has been designed to enable the association of names with the objects to which they refer; and in Lithuania a Database of Lithuanian Toponyms manages names and their related geographical objects. Lithuania also provides information on a project to create a portal to all digital geographical information and a place-names database. New Zealand is planning to implement a Gazetteer database system in 2012. Slovenia gives details of its Register of Geographical Names and outlines the data models. The Netherlands has completed its basic topographical database with attributes for names and objects linked and in Germany a (Gazetteer-) web service has been developed. Egypt describes related work of its Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics and the Center for the Documentation of Civilised and Natural Heritage. The Republic of Korea reports on upgrades to its geographical names management system and Brazil, Canada, Croatia, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Sweden all describe their online access to place-name information. Canada also explains the benefits of using Unicode-compliant fonts to ensure the correct display of its Aboriginal names in digital environments. Lithuania provides a comprehensive list of national toponymic sources and maps; the ongoing update and maintenance of the State Catalogue of Geographical Names are detailed in the report of the Russian Federation; the Palestinian National Authority is involved in obtaining and documenting geographical names in Arabic and English and reports on progress thus far and future plans. Jamaica is beginning work on the compilation of an updated modern national gazetteer; Suriname is keen to establish a digital geographical names register and website as part of its spatial data infrastructure; Ukraine has completed preparatory work for its State Register of Geographical Names. Malaysia is nearing completion of its Malaysian Geographical Names Database and Web Gazetteer based on its 1:25,000 and 1:50,000-scale topographic database; Sri Lanka has published a “Village List” by province; Kenya is preparing a digital new edition of its Official Standard Names Gazetteer; Jordan has produced an index of Jordanian locations, as well as an *Atlas of Jordan and the World* (2011, Arabic and English).

#### National standards

Mexico describes three Technical Standards compiled to handle different types of names. The development of national guidelines and standards as part of geographical names collection and processing is also covered in the reports of Canada, Indonesia, Jamaica, New Zealand, the Russian

Federation and Vietnam. Australia's report contains an Annex of its detailed Guidelines for the Consistent Use of Place Names.

#### Websites and portals

National websites and useful links are included in many of the papers and are too numerous to draw out in this summary paper.

#### Exonyms and country names

Several reports cover the national use of exonyms and/or country names, including those of Austria, Croatia, Estonia, Germany, Islamic Republic of Iran, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia and Ukraine. In the Netherlands the Working Group on Foreign Geographical Names of the Dutch Language Union meets regularly to discuss the standardisation of Dutch exonyms. In Latvia, the Latvian Language Experts Board at the State Language Centre is responsible for standardising the Latvian forms of foreign geographical names. In Spain, an online list of the names of cities in Europe with a population over 100,000 and of countries worldwide has been created.

#### Writing systems

Writing systems (mostly Romanisation) are described as part of national activities in many of the reports, eg. by the Russian Federation, Tunisia, and the Palestinian National Authority. Poland details rules for the romanisation of various scripts which have been drawn up for national use; Malaysia addresses the treatment and romanisation of names written in Jawi; Ukraine describes the national adoption of a system of romanisation for Ukrainian. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, a New Persian Romanization System (Transcription System) has been developed.

#### Maritime, undersea features and other

Maritime and/or undersea feature names are covered in reports submitted by Estonia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, Republic of Korea and New Zealand. Antarctic names are covered by Japan, Republic of Korea and New Zealand. Malaysia describes the responsibilities of its Working Group on Names of Islands and Off-Shore Geographical Entities, and an important part of Indonesia's work includes the naming of islands. The question of documenting the pronunciation of national toponyms is addressed by Malaysia.

#### Achievements

Most countries report significant progress over different areas; much new national legislation has been adopted in support of geographical names standardisation and names are frequently being captured from topographic maps to populate geographical names catalogues or databases. The importance of determining different ways of collecting and accessing geographical names data in the future, such as through crowd sourcing or web-based interfaces, including Linked Data, is being recognised and is mentioned in a number of the country reports. Progress has also been made in the formulation of new romanisation systems. International collaboration is exemplified by national support to the EuroGeoNames project and the UNGEGN database and regional initiatives such as those taking place in the Asia-Pacific area and described in Australia's report. UNGEGN plays an important role in supporting countries' standardisation of names as exemplified by eg Suriname's determination to move forward with its establishment of a national names authority on the basis of UN Resolutions. Divisional support is also clearly welcomed and appreciated, as is the contribution of the Task Team for Africa.

## **Challenges**

The global economic situation continues to impact national geographical names activities and several countries mention the forced inactivity of their names committees or reduced activities due to financial restraints. The lack of awareness of the importance of geographical names standardisation is an ongoing problem and is mentioned by for example Kenya and the importance of providing training to address this is acknowledged. There are many factors that influence progress in geographical names standardisation and this is examined by several countries. Mongolia acknowledges the lack of progress in geographical names activities over the past 20 years due to political and economic changes, and Senegal notes the difficulties of using French as a base for the representation of its toponyms which have their roots in many different national languages. Malaysia highlights potential problems with a lack of continuity of staff working on its Database project and reports on methods employed to overcome this issue. A lack of regulation in some countries has led to a rather inconsistent approach to the rendering of some nation's names; this issue is exemplified in Senegal's report which includes a sample list of the differences between names being used locally and those found on maps. Madagascar also comments on the growing emergence of older names. The proliferation of unregulated and unofficial geographical names on the internet can cause considerable confusion and the promotion of national official names is becoming increasingly important.

## **Conclusion**

There has clearly been a great deal of progress in national standardisation over the reporting period, although a lack of resources continues to affect toponymic work, and reports have only been submitted by one in five UN Member states. A focus on national and international training has raised awareness of geographical names issues and much regional and international collaboration is evident. There is an increased focus on posting national names data online for public access, which could help to address the question of the increased availability of unofficial names appearing online. Consideration could be given as to how national toponymic activity can be further encouraged and also how to offer the best and most effective means of support to non-participating countries.

## ANNEX

### List of documents submitted under item 4 of the agenda: Reports by Governments on the situation in their countries and on the progress made in the standardization of geographical names since the Ninth Conference:

Malaysia Country Report E/CONF.101/4, submitted by Malaysia  
Informe De España E/CONF.101/6, submitted by Spain  
Report of Denmark E/CONF.101/11, submitted by Denmark  
Report of Sri Lanka E/CONF.101/13, submitted by Sri Lanka  
Report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland E/CONF.101/14, submitted by United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland  
Report of Jordan E/CONF.101/15, submitted by Jordan  
Report of Egypt E/CONF.101/16, submitted by Egypt  
Standardization of geographical names in Mongolia between 2008- 2012 E/CONF.101/17, submitted by Mongolia  
Report of Tunisia activities 2011-2012 E/CONF.101/19, submitted by Tunisia  
Report of Palestine E/CONF.101/20, submitted by Palestine  
Status of Standardization of Geographical Names in Kenya E/CONF.101/21, submitted by Kenya  
Report of Lithuania E/CONF.101/23, submitted by Lithuania  
Le problème des toponymies au Sénégal: plaidoyer pour une action concertée de normalisation des noms géographiques E/CONF.101/29, submitted by Sénégal  
Report of The Netherlands E/CONF.101/32, submitted by The Netherlands  
Report of Japan E/CONF.101/34/Rev.1, submitted by Japan  
Report of Russian Federation E/CONF.101/41, submitted by Russian Federation  
Report of Poland E/CONF.101/45, submitted by Poland  
Report of New Zealand E/CONF.101/49/Add.1 (Summary), submitted by New Zealand  
Report of Australia E/CONF.101/53, submitted by Australia  
Report of Suriname E/CONF.101/58, submitted by Suriname  
Report of Vietnam E/CONF.101/59, submitted by Vietnam  
Report of Austria E/CONF.101/60, submitted by Austria  
Rapport présenté par Madagascar E/CONF.101/62, submitted by Madagascar  
Situation de la Normalisation des Noms Geographiques au Cameroun et Progres realises depuis la Neuvieme Conference E/CONF.101/63, submitted by Cameroon  
Report of Estonia E/CONF.101/64, submitted by Estonia  
Rapport du Burkina Faso à la dixième Conférence des Nations Unies sur les noms géographiques E/CONF.101/69, submitted by Burkina Faso  
Report of Slovenia E/CONF.101/71, submitted by Slovenia  
National Report of Italy E/CONF.101/72, submitted by Italy  
Report of Finland E/CONF.101/80, submitted by Finland  
Standardization of Geographical Names in Ukraine for the period of 2007– 2012 E/CONF.101/85, submitted by Ukraine  
Report of Germany E/CONF.101/93, submitted by Germany  
Report of Croatia E/CONF.101/98, submitted by Croatia  
Report of Brazil E/CONF.101/99, submitted by Brazil  
Report of Iran E/CONF.101/100, submitted by Islamic Republic of Iran  
Informe de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos E/CONF.101/109, submitted by Mexico



Report on the Work on the Standardization of Geographical Names in the Republic of Korea between 2007 and 2012

E/CONF.101/110, submitted by Republic of Korea

National Report of the Republic of Indonesia E/CONF.101/119, submitted by Indonesia

Country Report - Sweden E/CONF.101/128, submitted by Sweden

Country Report – Canada E/CONF.101/132, submitted by Canada

Report of Latvia E/CONF.101/138, submitted by Latvia

Report of Jamaica E/CONF.101/CRP1, submitted by Jamaica

National standardization of geographical names in the Republic of Belarus E/CONF.101/CRP9, submitted by Belarus

Report of Norway E/CONF.101/CRP10, submitted by Norway

Review of Standardization of Geographical Names in the DPRK after the Ninth UN Conference on Standardization of Geographical Names E/CONF.101/CRP14, submitted by Democratic People's Republic of Korea

National Report of Turkey E/CONF.101/CRP20, submitted by Turkey

Report of Hungary 2007-2012 E/CONF.101/CRP23, submitted by Hungary

Report of Ireland 2007-2012 E/CONF.101/CRP25, submitted by Ireland

National Report - Republic of the Philippines E/CONF.101/CRP28, submitted by the Republic of the Philippines

South Africa country report E/CONF.101/CRP29, submitted by South Africa

Report of Greece E/CONF.101/CRP31, submitted by Greece

Report of the Republic Mozambique, E/CONF.101/CRP33, submitted by the Republic Mozambique

Report concerning the progress made in Romania in the standardization of geographical names between 2007 - 2012

E/CONF.101/CRP34/Rev.1, submitted by Romania

Country Report of Georgia E/CONF.101/CRP35, submitted by Georgia

Rapport du Togo E/CONF.101/CRP36, submitted by Togo