



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
13 June 2012
English
Original: English, French

Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

New York, 31 July – 9 August 2012

Point 8(b) of the provisional agenda*

National standardization:

Office treatment of name

Draft resolution on Heritage Criteria

Submitted by Canada**

* E/CONF.101/1.

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Background

At the 26th session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), held May 2–6, 2011, in Vienna, the Commission de toponymie du Québec (Canada) presented a working document titled *Proposed Criteria for Establishing and Evaluating the Cultural Heritage of Place Names*. The document underscored the importance of preserving the world's toponymic heritage, and presented various criteria to evaluate the heritage value of place names.¹

Safeguarding the toponymic heritage of each country depends on the actions and decisions of the competent authorities involved in this area in each country. Therefore, it is essential that these authorities receive guidance with respect to toponomic standardization. Names that are an integral part of our intangible cultural heritage must be adequately protected from changes by the administrators who have this responsibility.

The author of the document recommended incorporating criteria to evaluate the heritage value of place names in the Principles of Office Treatment of Geographical Names, as presented in resolution I/4C. Because pre-existing resolutions cannot be amended, we propose that a new resolution to this effect be adopted at the Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

It should be noted that the adoption of such a resolution could prove to be more effective in safeguarding toponyms with high heritage value than entering them on a list of names to be protected.

Draft resolution

The Conference,

Noting the existence of a number of resolutions that address toponymy as part of a nation's cultural heritage and the necessity to preserve toponymic heritage;

Recalling resolution I/4 C on the Principles of Office Treatment of Geographical Names;

Considering that to develop these principles, it is recommended that unnecessary changes to geographical names be avoided and that the treatment of names should not operate to suppress significant toponomic elements;

Considering also that none of these principles describes how to recognize a name that should be protected for its heritage qualities;

Recommends that to recognize and protect such a geographical name, the following characteristics be used:

1. The document in question should be referred to for more complete background information: *Proposed Criteria for Establishing and Evaluating the Cultural Heritage of Place Names*. Document prepared by Marc Richard, Commission de toponymie du Québec, Canada (W.P. 56, item 17 on the agenda). [http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/26th-gegn-docs/WP/WP56_Cult%20criteria%20EN.pdf] (Retrieved February 22, 2012).

- 1) The *age* of a name, as indicated by the date of the oldest possible record of the name;
- 2) The *resilience* of a name, as indicated by the duration of its continued use up to the present or by its notable capacity to transcend history;
- 3) The *rarity* of a name or of a toponymic phenomenon pointed out by the name;
- 4) The *testimoniality* of a name, or its capacity to clearly embody a cultural, geographical, historical, social or other reality that is specific to the place and an essential component of local, regional or national identity;
- 5) The *appeal* of a name, which corresponds to a feeling of belonging associated with the name and the place it designates;
- 6) The *imageability* of a name, or its capacity to inspire ideas or strong, rich images within users, without these images or ideas necessarily referring to history or local trivia.