



## Economic and Social Council

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

New York, 31 July-9 August 2012

Item 9 of the provisional agenda\*

**Geographical names as culture, heritage and identity  
(including indigenous, minority and regional language names)**

### Highlights of the Tunisian toponymic landscape

#### Summary\*\*

The toponymic landscape of any country is the mirror that reflects the historical, cultural, political and most social aspects of a society.

The long history of civilization in Tunisia led to geographical names in Tunisia being in a mixture of languages. The toponymic landscape is still dominated mainly by the names that depict the Berberian, Phoenician/Carthaginian, Roman, Andalusian and French history and heritage of the country.

The toponymy is generally twinned with the cartography which still relies partly on the existing maps, inherited from the colonial period and which represent a remarkable distortion at the toponymic level. In addition, the lack of linguistically skilled surveyors who collect names in the field, in parallel with the lack of scrutiny research on the semantic scope of names and the lack of standardization tools, are together important aspects that have contributed to the deformation and the heterogeneity of geographical names in Tunisia.

Following the revolution of 14 January 2011, this landscape has once again changed and has been given another perspective as a result.

There were conflicting opinions about the changing of names during the revolution and the attribution of new ones, between approving the new given names in relation to the revolution and disapproving them and suggesting a most symbolic names' selection that may withstand all the vicissitudes of history.

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\* E/CONF.101/1.

\*\* The full report was prepared by Naima Friha of the National Centre for Cartography and Remote Sensing, Tunisia, and is available in the language of submission only from <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/ungegnConf10.html>.



Awareness of the regulation of geographical names and its protection from further distortion and abuses becomes then an emergency rather than a necessity. Faced with this situation, the National Centre for Cartography and Remote Sensing, empowered by resolution I/4 of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, has urged the setting up of a national toponymic committee, which is pending approval.

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