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Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

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Item 7 of the provisional agenda*

Measures taken and proposed to implement

United Nations resolutions on the standardization

of geographical names, including the economic and social benefits

Initiative for the preparation of an Act on Place Names

Submitted by Finland**

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Initiative for the preparation of an Act on Place Names

The Institute for the Languages of Finland and the National Land Survey of Finland made a joint proposal through their respective Ministries (Ministry of Education and Culture and Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry) on 19 December 2011, suggesting that the Finnish Government should take action for the preparation of an Act on Place Names and setting up of an official body in charge of place names. According to the proposal, official organizing of the place names legislation and practices would make administration more effective and facilitate the coordination of cooperation between institutes, at the same time securing people's living conditions for its part.

The proposal suggested the following concrete measures:

- In order to guarantee that place names are handled by different authorities in an appropriate manner, it would be necessary to gather the regulations concerning decisions on place names that are currently scattered in different acts under one and the same act.
- The act should specify what names the legislation covers, who has the right to approve the different names, what facts should be taken into account in the approval process, what type of specialist assistance would be necessary, how the names that have been approved should be registered, who is in charge of the registration, and what names should be used in official contexts.
- At the same time, it should be defined what type of a joint organ consisting of different operators (official place names authority body) would have the rights to solve far-reaching and contradictory place name questions, and what the legal status of this authority body would be.

The justifications for the proposal included a detailed account of the need for a place names act in Finland, the role of place names in societal activities, the current situation in Finland from the perspective of planned names (administrative areas, traffic operating points – ports, airports, railway stations, etc.; planned nomenclature in planned areas and sparsely populated areas – area names, street names, road names, etc.); and from the perspective of traditional place names, memorial names, the media, and private institutes of cartography; further, the previous measures to prepare place name legislation were repeated in the justifications.

Reference was also made to the official handling of place names beyond the Finnish borders, especially in the Nordic countries; to the UN resolutions for the setting up of national place names authorities; and to the number of national names authorities in the UN member states.