

FINAL PRESS RELEASE

FIFTEENTH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GROUP OF EXPERTS
ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

The importance of names as significant elements of the cultural heritage of nations, and the economic advantage of standardizing geographical names, as well as the necessity to encourage state authorities to provide appropriate support to standardization activities and to recognize them as an important part of national programmes of international cooperation and technical assistance were demonstrated at the XVth Session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names held at the United Nations Office at Geneva from 11 to 19 November 1991.

More than 70 experts and observers from 41 countries and international organizations convened and reviewed the progress achieved since the previous session that had been held in 1989.

Scientific and technical aid and advice to developing countries in organizing and operating national names authorities, the working out of principles and methods for solving the various problems of international standardization (for example, definition of geographical terms, transfers between writing systems, treatment of names of international geographic features) were among subjects of discussion by experts.

It was noticed that a controversial process of the reduction of foreign and imposed names (exonyms) as a result of development and political processes in some countries and preservation of those names in others is continuing, in spite of the recommendation by the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (1987) to reduce the use of exonyms. The reduction could be expedited if the media more often followed the lists of geographical names published by the national geographical names authorities.

An agreed need to establish and to strengthen national names authorities, especially in developing countries, especially in Africa, as a part of the infrastructure for the national planning and international co-operation, was strongly supported by the participants.

The experts approved a provisional agenda for the Sixteenth Session of the UNGEGN and for the Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names to be subsequently held at the United Nations headquarters in New York from 24 August to 4 September 1992.

The experts encouraged the United Nations to expand the efforts of the United Nations Department of Technical Co-operation for Development in the field of establishing national geographical names authorities and training of personnel.