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UNITED NATIONS GROUP OF EXPERTS ON
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
Sixteenth session
New York, 24 August and 4 September 1992

Report of the Chairman

1. This report covers only the period subsequent to the fifteenth session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, held in Geneva in November 1991, when Professor Henri Dorion retired as Chairman.

Training course in toponymy

2. Resolution 18 of the Second United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, resolution 15 of the Third Conference and resolution 16 of the Fourth Conference recommended the holding of training courses in applied toponymy. Resolution 21 of the Fifth Conference specifically recommended that such a training course be held inter alia in the Africa East Division. The countries in that Division include Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. At the fifteenth session of the Group of Experts in Geneva last year, an invitation was extended by the Director of the Infrastructure Branch, Department of Economic and Social Development, Mrs. Dunja Pastizzi-Ferencic, for a toponymic training course to be held for developing countries. The Dutch- and German-speaking Division requested that a training course be arranged for southern African countries.

3. In accordance with these considerations, a training course was arranged and invitations extended to participants from Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Attempts to hold the course in Namibia were unsuccessful, and the course was held in Pretoria.

4. Resolution 5 of the Fifth Conference recommended that training in toponymy be provided at university or corresponding academic level. In pursuance of that resolution, a national geographical names survey has been launched in South Africa. All the universities in the country, as well as several other institutions, are participating in this survey. The training course mentioned above served to prepare participants in the survey and thus also addressed resolution 5 of the Fifth Conference.

Toponymic guidelines for map and other editors

5. In pursuance of resolution 4 of the Fourth Conference, a letter was distributed by the Secretariat encouraging those countries which had not yet prepared "Toponymic guidelines for map and other editors", to do so. Countries which had already submitted "Toponymic guidelines" were encouraged to consider whether a later edition was required. In addition, a separate communication was directed at each southern African country mentioned above, and this was accompanied by a copy of the third edition of "Toponymic guidelines for South Africa" as an example.

Cooperation with the Economic Commission for Africa

6. In accordance with the efforts of the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation to collaborate with other agencies and bodies, beneficial contact has been taken up with the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). ECA has for some time shared the concern of the Group of Experts at the non-participation in the activities of the Group of Experts by some countries. ECA is now attempting, in collaboration with the Group of Experts to reactivate, revitalize and coordinate toponymic activities in Africa. ECA has contacted experts in the various African countries, thus reinforcing an approach early in the year by the Chairman encouraging the participation of those countries in the Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, and in the activities of the Group of Experts. Moreover, in accordance with decisions taken by ECA as early as 1989, ECA has prepared a proposal for the establishment of an Africa South Division within the Group of Experts. This is a most logical step, in view of the geographical and linguistic situation of the countries involved. An Africa South Division would complement the existing Africa Central, Africa East and Africa West Divisions.

Proposed trust fund or foundation

7. The non-participation of developing countries in Group of Expert sessions and United Nations conferences has been attributed inter alia to a lack of funds. Such a situation is often of a sensitive nature, and identifying and categorizing indigent countries could cause offence. To address this problem, the Chairman proposes the establishment of a trust fund or foundation. If the Conference concurs with such an effort, ECA would be willing to assist in the establishment of an extended trust fund or foundation of the Group of Experts to which experts from less affluent sectors could apply for subvention in order to participate in meetings.

Vote of thanks

8. The Chairman expressed appreciation to the Secretariat for ensuring that contributions to the Newsletter were obtained and the Newsletter prepared; for their consistent and prompt cooperation during his term of office, and for all they had done in preparing the present Conference. He also thanked the Vice-Chairperson, the Rapporteur, the convenors and temporary convenors of the working groups, the chairmen and members of the geographical/linguistic divisions, and all the other experts, for continuing the work of the Group of Experts, for responding to his appeals where relevant, and for taking the initiative in a number of different matters.
