

Agenda item 17, 18, 19

SIXTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE STANDARDIZATION
OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES: EVALUATION

Prepared by Helen Kerfoot, Vice-Chair, UNGEGN

At the close of the Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in New York in 1992, twenty-five individuals provided feedback for future conferences and for UNGEGN's planning role. The most commonly noted comments are summarized here.

SIXTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES: EVALUATION

Submitted by: Helen Kerfoot (Canada)
Vice-Chair, UNGEGN

At the close of the Sixth Conference in New York evaluation forms were circulated to delegates. Twenty five individuals (from 23 States) chose to complete these forms and so provide valuable feedback for future conferences and for UNGEGN's planning role.

Some of the more commonly expressed thoughts are presented here for general information purposes.

1. The most useful aspects of the Conference

- (a) These quite clearly focussed on the opportunity to come together to make personal contacts; to exchange ideas, experience and documentation; and to increase awareness of innovations, progress and problems of various member states.

2. What could have been better or more useful

- (a) Only some delegates had received reports ahead of time. The improved participation and general benefit of having documentation for review before the conference was emphasized.
- (b) Several respondents commented about the excessive length of oral presentations of various national reports. As a result, insufficient time was available for discussion of important items of common interest.
- (c) Participants would have liked scheduled time for working groups, divisions and particular interest groups to convene.
- (d) Rules of procedure should be better known.
- (e) Guidelines should have been available to participants on procedures for seeking training funds through the United Nations.

3. Changes in approach, content, organization, etc. suggested for the next Conference

- (a) As far as possible, documents should be circulated several weeks ahead of time; possibly these could be sent directly to national names authorities.
- (b) Documents that become available at the Conference itself should be distributed as early as possible.
- (c) More contacts should be made with other organizations, and their participation encouraged on equal terms.
- (d) More commitment should be made by the United Nations to provide funds to states needing assistance to participate.

- (e) Continuity of participation should be emphasized, and States that were formerly active should be encouraged.
- (f) Oral presentations (particularly of national reports) should be shortened. Summaries should be circulated and used for presentation purposes.
- (g) Less time should be spent on organizational and administrative matters, and on items of political involvement.
- (h) Better planning would provide more time for discussion and less for presentations; more concentration should be on core issues, and a more problem-oriented approach could be used.
- (i) Mini-training sessions would be useful for those chairing sessions.
- (j) Participants from all Member States should have the opportunity to discuss issues, without the domination of any particular group or individuals, and with democratic decision-making processes.
- (k) Resolutions should be developed before or during the Conference, rather than at the last minute, and less time should be spent by the whole Conference on exact wording of resolutions.
- (l) More time should be scheduled for various committees and interest groups to meet within scheduled sessions.
- (m) A committee addressing legal aspects of legislation for geographical names would be welcomed.
- (n) Hours of work should be lengthened, and breaks should be more frequent. With less repetition of ideas, the length of the Conference could be shortened.
- (o) More extra-curricula activities, including the possibility of local field work, would be appreciated.

4. Main goals of the UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

- (a) To encourage national and international standardization (practical rather than academic) of geographical names.
- (b) To encourage the sharing and exchange of ideas, documents and techniques; and to promote sensitive approaches to the resolution of geographical names questions.
- (c) To provide training, principles, procedures and guidelines for the standardization of geographical names and for the development of data base files and the publication of gazetteers.
- (d) To encourage international cooperation.
- (e) To reduce exonyms.
- (f) To encourage the development of standardized Romanization systems.

5. Important items for UNGEGN to undertake in the next five years

- (a) Follow up Conference resolutions and promote implementation through divisions.
- (b) Review the working procedures of the UN Conferences.
- (c) Identify needs and provide (particularly at divisional levels) support/training, and assistance in the development of infrastructures for national standardization.
- (d) Increase government awareness of the importance of geographical names standardization and promote its benefits.
- (e) Disseminate documents to all Member States.
- (f) Assure the availability of a handbook, a glossary of terminology, and a collection of toponymic guidelines.
- (g) Promote cooperation between linguistic/geographical divisions.
- (h) Encourage the development of single Romanization systems for other writing systems of the world.