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**Item 5
of the Provisional Agenda**

REPORTS OF THE DIVISIONS

Report of the United States/Canada Division

Prepared by Roger L. Payne (USA) and Barbara Bowler (Canada)

**TWENTIETH SESSION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS GROUP
OF EXPERTS ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
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DIVISION REPORTS

Report of the United States/Canada Division

Submitted by: United States of America

Prepared by Roger L. Payne (USA) and Barbara Bowler (Canada)

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Since the Nineteenth Session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) in January 1998, representatives of the USA/Canada Division have met five times informally in association with other geographical name activities including the annual meetings of the Council of Geographic Names Authorities and Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names which have proved to be ideal sessions for discussions. Several areas of cooperation and issues of mutual interest may be mentioned. Naming authorities in the United States and Canada (national and state/provincial) have continued to cooperate closely by exchanging documentation, and making recommendations in accordance with the bilateral agreement signed between the two national names authorities in 1988 regarding transboundary names. The terms of cooperation in the Transboundary Agreement were especially useful over the past two years regarding joint efforts between Canada and the United States for bathymetric mapping projects in the Great Lakes of North America.

There have also been discussions and formal exchange of ideas and documentation regarding names automation, especially regarding electronic data exchange and web-based applications.

Representatives from each member State of the Division participated in a symposium addressing issues of digital gazetteer development held in Washington, D.C., USA, in October 1999. Members of the Division also served as facilitators for the session that discussed governmental standards for digital gazetteers. The attendees were from the private sector, State government, the Federal Government of the United States, and representatives from six other nations including Canada.

The collection, use, and application of indigenous names continues to be of paramount interest to the national names authorities in Canada and the United States. Various aspects of applied toponymy demonstrate the need to process efficiently names proposals and names collection. In Canada efforts have concentrated on procedures for assisting the indigenous community in processing such proposals. In the United States, there have been numerous projects focused on collecting indigenous names, especially in National Parks.

The issues of principles, policies, and procedures have been an active agenda item in both member States of the Division. Since the last session, the Secretariat of the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names has completed a review of the notes explaining the Principles and Procedures for Geographical Naming culminating in the publication of a revised edition in the Spring of 1999. The United States had completed a similar review and analysis resulting in the publication of Principles, Policies, and Procedures: Domestic Geographic Names in August 1997. The U.S. Board on Geographic Names has scheduled a Policy Review Conference for April 2000 to review the 1997 publication and to address and possibly to codify the many practices encouraged or enforced by the Board. Examples of these include the use of the genitive apostrophe, acronyms as names, orthography, use of generic terms, names of regions, and other similar topics.

A representative from Canada has completed a thorough review and analysis of the full set of Resolutions adopted at the various sessions of the Group of Experts, as well as those resolutions from

the previous seven United Nations conferences on the standardization of geographical names.

Representatives from the United States held a joint meeting with representatives of the United Kingdom Division in London 27 October - 4 November 1999. A number of issues were resolved and topics of mutual interest were explored.

Also, representatives from the United States held three informal meetings with representatives of the Latin American Division (of which the United States is also a member) since the last UNGEGN session. These were very beneficial sessions concentrating on the interpretation of policies of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names, and those of similar authorities in Central and South America.