
**United Nations
Group of Experts on
Geographical Names**

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Item 5
of the Provisional Agenda

REPORTS OF THE DIVISIONS

Report of the Africa South Division

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AFRICA SOUTH DIVISION REPORT TO THE 20TH UNITED NATIONS GROUP OF EXPERTS ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES AT THE UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS, NEW YORK, 18 JANUARY 2000.

The South African Geographical Names Council was established in terms of Act 118 of 1998. This new Council replaces the old Place Names Committee that was established before 1994.

The Council comprises twenty five (25) members. Three (3) members are appointed by organisations specified in the Act: (i) The (Pansalb) Pan South African Language Board; (ii) The South African Post Office; (iii) The Department of Land Affairs, Chief Directorate of Surveys and Mapping. The thirteen (13) members are appointed by the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology after a process of public consultation during which the public is notified by the Minister to suggest members. The other nine (9) members are appointed by provinces.

The new SAGNC has a Chairperson, Dr L F Mathenjwa who takes over from Dr Raper, who chaired the old Committee. The Deputy Chairperson will be elected from amongst members during their next meeting. The Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology provides the Secretariat for the new Council. This means that the running costs of the new Council are borne from funds by the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology.

WHY THE NEW COUNCIL?

The mandate of the old Place Names Committee has been too narrow to deal with changing needs in South Africa. The old Committee dealt only with names of towns, cities, streets and excluded other important geographical features such as rivers and mountains. The naming policy for South Africa was based on a policy of a government that discriminated against all the local indigenous languages resulting in the relegation or removal of place names that were in the African languages. We have a unique situation in South Africa where the local communities use an African geographical name while the government uses a different, usually European name. The old Committee did not address this problem, thereby disregarding the topographical factors that led to the naming of that geographical feature.

The old Place Names Committee excluded Black South Africans in its activities and only afforded them observer status in its deliberations. The new government of South Africa felt that this Committee had to be replaced with a more representative Council that will involve the majority of the people of South Africa.

MANDATE OF THE NEW COUNCIL

- (a) Advise Minister on new names to be standardised, to be changed and to be corrected.
- (b) Advise Minister on other geographical features like rivers, mountains, etc.
- (c) Expand mandate from that of towns and streets.
- (d) Establish place names database - computerise names and, make them available to the public by publication of national gazetteers.
- (e) Establish provincial place names structures.
- (f) Formulate new regulations and policy on naming for RSA in line with new Act aligned with Constitution and UN Resolutions on Place Names.

AFRICA SOUTH DIVISION - REPORT

The South African delegation, ladies and gentlemen, is a new delegation and has not been able to discuss Dr Möller's report with her. The new Chairperson, Dr L F Mathenjwa, will therefore not be in a position to go through the report included in the package from the Africa South division, except to confirm that the Africa South division has not held any meetings. This means that there is no report that included South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi. The only other country from the division that has activities to report on is Mozambique. I would request the Chairperson to afford them the opportunity to make their own presentation to the session.

As South Africa and leaders of the Africa South division, we will revive efforts to hold meetings that will involve all members of the Africa South division. We are not certain why other countries in Southern Africa do not participate in the activities of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names. We will try and use other forums of the Southern African Development Communities (SADC) to encourage active participation of our colleagues from Southern Africa.