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Report of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names on the work of its twenty-first session

(Berlin, Germany, 26 August and 6 September 2002)

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I. Terms of reference

1. In pursuance of Economic and Social Council decision 2000/230 of 26 July 2000, the Secretary-General invited the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) to convene its twenty-first session in Berlin on 26 August and 6 September 2002.

II. Attendance

2. The session, held in conjunction with the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, was attended by 282 representatives and observers from 88 countries, representing all the 22 geographical/linguistic divisions of the Group of Experts (see annex I). The complete list of experts who participated in the session and the Conference is given in annex I to the report of the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (United Nations publication, forthcoming).

III. Officers of the session

3. The officers for the session were as follows:

Chairperson:

Peter E. Raper

Vice-Chairperson:

Helen Kerfoot

Rapporteur:

Roger L. Payne

IV. Opening of the session

4. The Chairperson opened the session and welcomed the experts. He stressed the importance of their work, and particularly thanked them for their efforts since the last UNGEGN session. He also extended thanks on behalf of UNGEGN to the Federal Republic of Germany and to the German Foreign Office for graciously serving as hosts for the UNGEGN session and for the Eighth Conference.

V. Adoption of the agenda

5. The agenda was adopted as presented, with items 1 to 4 to be discussed on 26 August, items 5 to 10 on 6 September:

1. Opening of the session.
2. Adoption of the agenda.
3. Reports of the working groups.
4. Organizational matters concerning the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

5. Review of the statute of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.
6. Election of officers.
7. Planning for implementation of the recommendations of the Eighth Conference.
8. Working groups for future requirements.
9. Provisional agenda for the twenty-second session.
10. Other business.

VI. Reports of the working groups

A. Country names

6. Ms. Lejeune, the Convener, presented working paper No. 1.
7. The working group met on 14 and 15 May 2001 in London, with the specific goal of updating the country names list published in 1998. Priority was given to compiling the official local names of countries, so that the revised list could be presented to the Eighth Conference.
8. The Convener noted that the country names in English, French and Spanish still posed some problems since the names listed by the working group were sometimes at variance with the names used in the *United Nations Terminology Bulletin No. 347*. It was recognized that forms used by the *Bulletin* must be retained in the working group country names list, but divergent forms used nationally should also be included.
9. Addition of the country names as used in the Russian Federation had also been proposed.

B. Romanization systems

10. Mr. Päll, the Convener, summarized working paper No. 3 and indicated that full details would be presented at the Conference.
11. The working group met at the twentieth UNGEGN session in January 2000 and in London in May 2001. The working group web site (www.eki.ee/wgrs) was discussed, as well as progress on the romanization of Belorussian, Georgian and Korean. It was also noted that inquiries regarding romanization had been sent to Armenia, Cambodia, Thailand and Ukraine, but replies had not yet been received. Also, it was mentioned that new official Roman alphabets in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan had become stable.
12. It was commented that Kazakhstan had published maps using Roman script, but the Convener noted that Kazakhstan was not yet officially using Roman script, and therefore, those maps must be scrutinized closely.
13. It was commented that considerable efforts had been made regarding an analysis of the transliteration system for Arabic, but that other priorities had delayed

that work. The Convener indicated that the Working Group eagerly awaited the recommendation of the Arabic Division.

C. Toponymic terminology

14. Mr. Kadmon, the Convener, summarized working paper No. 4. The working group was formed in 1989 to review and revise glossary No. 330. The first draft of the new glossary was presented to UNGEGN in 1989 with 286 entries, compared to 175 in glossary No. 330. The number of entries had grown to 375 as a result of continued efforts of the working group.

15. The *Glossary of Terms for the Standardization of Geographical Names* had been published in the six official languages of the United Nations and would be available at the Conference. There was comment regarding the original translation work undertaken by experts, and some subsequent difficulties and delays in processing the final translations. Production problems that arose were summarized, including alphabetical ordering, indexing problems, differing introductions, cross-reference problems, missing examples, and some differing definitions.

D. Publicity and funding

16. Mr. Munro, the Convener, presented working paper No. 5. The group last met at the twentieth session of UNGEGN in New York in January 2000. Since that time, the UNGEGN brochure had been published in various languages, including publication by the United Nations in its six official languages. Also, it was noted that the UNGEGN web site (unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo) had been developed and had been launched in April 2002.

17. There was a special place name session included in the Twenty-Ninth International Geographical Congress (IGC), held in Seoul in August 2000, at which the work of UNGEGN was promoted. The next IGC was scheduled for August 2004 in Glasgow.

18. A reception in the presence of HRH The Princess Royal was held for the joint working group meetings in London in May 2001. That opportunity had allowed the promotion of UNGEGN work, especially regarding outreach to developing countries.

19. It was announced that the book containing the various resolutions of UNGEGN (known as the red book) would be edited and a revised edition was anticipated. All had agreed that the red book was most useful, especially for use with media interviews.

20. It was noted that in January 2001, several experts from UNGEGN had attended the Seventh United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for the Americas, where they were responsible for developing two parts of a resolution addressing standardized geographical names in relation to national spatial data infrastructures.

E. Toponymic data files and gazetteers

21. Mr. Flynn, the Convener, presented working paper No. 6. Much of the group's work was described in the latest *UNGEGN Newsletter*. It was noted that a meeting had been held in April 2001 in Slovenia, serving to keep the group focused on specific objectives. In keeping with UNGEGN resolutions, liaison had successfully been established with the UNICODE consortium and ISO/TC 211 on geographic information/geomatics. Other objectives in the working group's plan were outlined, including establishing its web site (www.zrc-sazu.si/ungegn), report maintenance on toponymic data exchange formats and standards, and toponymic data exchange workshops, such as the one held in Slovenia in 2001.

22. The United Nations Geographic Information Working Group (UNGIWG) held its third meeting in Washington in June 2002. It was clear that UNGIWG is looking to UNGEGN for advice and guidelines with regard to the inclusion of geographical names in establishing a United Nations spatial data infrastructure.

23. Also, in the Global Spatial Data Infrastructure (GSDI), which aimed to promote the exchange of national and regional spatial data, geographical names were a critical component. United States representatives would describe the important work of UNGEGN at the forthcoming GSDI international meeting to be held in Budapest.

24. The working group has made significant developments and now must define its role to be effective in those international efforts.

F. Evaluation and implementation

25. Mr. Lee, Co-Convener of the working group, presented working paper No. 9, prepared by three members of the working group. Since the Group was created at the twentieth UNGEGN session, much of its work had been concentrated on collecting and assembling available documents considered most useful to the user community.

26. There was discussion of possibly establishing a group to examine the best and most efficient means of distributing materials to the public. It was commented that it was useful to publish resolutions, but that they should be updated as to relevance, duplication, and contradiction.

27. The publicity and funding working group was encouraged to meet with the evaluation and implementation working group to streamline the work of both.

28. Ms. Möller presented working paper No. 8. She reported that the working paper arose from the meeting of a few experts in Pretoria, South Africa, in early August 2002. Discussion took place on such matters as preparation of maps, gazetteers, toponymic guidelines and web sites. A draft action plan was proposed to provide an umbrella task team to unite all UNGEGN working groups. The plan called for evaluation of the UNGEGN functions, involving member States not normally participating in UNGEGN, coordinating division activities and implementing relevant resolutions. The composition of the team and a statement of its possible tasks were presented, as well as a description of documents required to carry out the tasks.

G. Training courses in toponymy

29. Mr. Ormeling, the Convener, noted that there had been 10 training courses since the last Conference, including six offered by the Pan American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH). Courses had offered methods of standardization, a field exercise and training in automation. The working group had training materials available and the International Cartographic Association (ICA) would soon have an Internet training course with one module for geographical names.

30. The Dutch- and German-speaking Division was sponsoring a four-week training session, with the first week devoted to lectures on toponymic theory (held in the Netherlands), the second week to a field collection exercise in the environs of Frankfurt, Germany, and the last two weeks to attending the Conference in Berlin for the final part of the training course.

VII. Reports of the liaison officers, regional meetings and international organizations

Pan American Institute of Geography and History

31. Mr. Payne, the Liaison Officer for PAIGH, gave a short report of activity since the last meeting and indicated that a more detailed report of the last five years would be presented to the Conference.

Scientific Committee for Antarctic Research

32. Mr. Sievers, the Liaison Officer, presented working paper No. 2. The history regarding the compilation of the *Composite Gazetteer* since its inception in 1992 was described. In 1998, it was first published in two volumes and then made available on the Internet (www.pnra.it/SCAR_GAZE). The *Composite Gazetteer Database* was being updated on a continual basis. It contained approximately 34,000 names of some 17,000 features, with different language forms included for many features. Twenty-two countries and the International Hydrographic Organization had contributed to the *Gazetteer*.

33. It was noted that the Internet site offered search capability and the ability to download, at no charge, a .txt (text) file and an ARCINFO export file. The name approved by each country and the locative attributes were recorded, but further discussion and analysis had indicated that a textual description as well as elevation and date of approval (establishing first official usage) were desirable.

VIII. Organizational matters concerning the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

34. The Vice-Chairperson presented working paper No. 7, which highlighted suggestions to make the UNGEGN sessions and the Conferences more efficient and effective. The evaluation from the Sixth Conference in 1992 was summarized, including suggestions to have documents available before the meeting, to limit the length of time for presentations, to establish presentation guidelines, and to develop resolutions prior to the end of the Conference. Proposals from the twentieth session

of UNGEGN were presented, including to hold shorter sessions and improve evaluation of the effectiveness of resolutions. All agreed that the various suggestions to improve efficiency and effectiveness must be considered.

35. The Chairperson indicated to the experts that the secretariat, in planning the Conference, had proposed the use of three technical committees, as at the Seventh Conference in 1998. The Chairperson noted that the secretariat would be accepting nominations for officers, including two Vice-Presidents and one Rapporteur/Editor-in-Chief for the Conference, as well as Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons and Rapporteurs for the three technical committees on national standardization, international standardization and technical matters.

IX. Amendment of rule 5 of the statute of the Group of Experts

36. The Chairperson informed the meeting that following informal consultations among delegates, it had been recommended that the Group of Experts elect a Chairperson, two Vice-Chairpersons and two Rapporteurs, instead of one Chairperson and only one Vice-Chairperson and one Rapporteur. To facilitate the change, the Group of Experts had to recommend to the Economic and Social Council the amendment of rule 5 of its statute. The second Vice-Chairperson and second Rapporteur would begin their term of office following the adoption of the recommendation by the Council.

37. The recommended amendment of rule 5 was submitted by the Chairperson and reads as follows:

The United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names recommends to the Economic and Social Council the adoption of the following decision:

“The Economic and Social Council decides to amend rule 5 of the rules of procedure of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names by replacing the current rule 5, which reads:

‘The Group shall elect the following officers from among the experts representing divisions: a Chairman, a Vice-Chairman and a Rapporteur.’

with the following rule:

‘The Group shall elect the following officers from among the experts representing divisions: a Chairperson, two Vice-Chairpersons and two Rapporteurs.’”

The recommendation was adopted by the session.*

38. It was pointed out that in section IX, rule 33, of the statute (E/CONF.94/CRP.2), Spanish had inadvertently been omitted from the list of official languages of the United Nations.

* The Council subsequently adopted the recommended amendment to rule 5 in its decision 2002/306.

X. Election of officers

39. The meeting agreed to elect the following members of its Bureau for the next term of office of the Group of Experts:

Chairperson:

Helen Kerfoot

Vice-Chairperson:

Brahim Atoui

Rapporteur:

Brian Goodchild

The meeting also agreed to elect the following as the additional Vice-Chairperson and Rapporteur, subject to the Council's adoption of the proposed amendment to rule 5:

Vice-Chairperson:

Joern Sievers

Rapporteur:

Donall Mac Giolla Easpaig

The new Chairperson, Helen Kerfoot, assumed office at this point in the meeting. She welcomed the new officers and acknowledged the valuable service of those who had just retired from office.

XI. Planning for implementation of the recommendations of the Eighth Conference

40. The Chairperson introduced the new resolutions, asking for comment from the floor, before considering the required working groups for implementation.

Resolution 1

Promotion of minority group and indigenous geographical names

41. This resolution will be discussed at the next session of UNGEGN. Since the resolution had been drafted by Australia, the Chairperson asked the Asia South-East and Pacific South-West Division to provide leadership in this discussion. The Norden Division commented that resolution 9 on geographical names as cultural heritage was a related resolution and should also be taken up at the next session of UNGEGN.

Resolution 11

Working group on the pronunciation of geographical names

42. The USA/Canada Division commented that the United States of America supported and attempted to implement all resolutions but expected some difficulty with the subject of pronunciation. The national committee had worked for three years on the matter without success. The China Division also spoke of complications with pronunciation with all languages in China; success would be difficult, but a standardized pronunciation was the objective. The USA/Canada Division commented that age, gender and background of a speaker all influenced pronunciation. In addition, systems for writing pronunciation posed a problem, and

non-linguists were unfamiliar with the International Phonetic Alphabet. The East Mediterranean Division (other than Arabic) also commented on the difficulties but felt that work should be started on the problem. The Dutch- and German-speaking Division referred to the pronunciation guide prepared for German national broadcasters. News readers for one station used the guide and although others did not, standardization was possible. The USA/Canada Division indicated that while not wishing to discourage UNGEGN work on the subject, it seemed impossible to determine pronunciation in the United States of America.

Resolution 5

Joint meetings of UNGEGN linguistic/geographical divisions and working groups

43. Some meetings had already been successfully held and others are encouraged.

XII. Working groups for future requirements

44. Exonyms: the Chairperson requested a show of hands for those interested in participation in the new working group and suggested an informal meeting at the coffee break.

45. Pronunciation: the Chairperson requested a show of hands for those interested in the new working group and suggested that they also have an informal meeting at the coffee break.

46. Mr. Ormeling, Convener of the working group on training courses in toponymy, reported that the group had convened a meeting in Berlin and discussed future courses, a web-based training course, finances, manuals and the composition of courses.

47. Ms. Burgess from the United Kingdom Division reported on behalf of Mr. Flynn, Convener of the working group on toponymic data files and gazetteers. The group had met in Berlin and reviewed the work plan, ISO/TC 211 requirements, UNGIWG developments, the working group web site, technical papers and other issues. The future work plan was also reviewed and a meeting proposed for 2003. New working group members were welcome. The Arabic Division commented on the success of the working group and the invitation for participation.

48. Mr. Kadmon, Convener of the working group on toponymic terminology, reported that the group had held a meeting in Berlin. The group was working on adding terms and definitions to the new glossary. Also the mechanics of maintenance of the glossary had been discussed. The Convener indicated a willingness to continue in that role.

49. Mr. Päll, Convener of the working group on romanization systems, advised that the romanization task was not yet complete, since some systems, especially some Asian languages, did not yet have formalized romanization systems. The group met in Berlin to continue the task. The report presented to the Conference as document E/CONF.94/CRP.81 was to be updated and romanization systems would be included in one of the UNGEGN publications proposed for 2004-2005. The composition of the group was outlined, and Mr. Päll was to continue as Convener.

50. The Arabic Division would submit a revised romanization table to UNGEGN. It was noted that agreement between the Arabic Division delegates would be

accepted by the League of Arab States, with no further referral required. However, the revisions to the amended Beirut system of 1972 still needed to be adopted by all Arab States.

51. The East Mediterranean Division (other than Arabic) commented that the information on romanization systems constituted a living document, and although there would always be ongoing work, the existing material should be published soon. Amendments could be added later.

52. The Chairperson requested that all working groups send their work programmes to the secretariat as soon as possible, for inclusion on the UNGEGN web site and in the next *UNGEGN Newsletter*.

53. Ms. Lejeune, Convener of the working group on country names, reported that the group had met in Berlin and would update the list of country names in the local forms and make any necessary corrections. She outlined the membership of the group and advised that she would continue as Convener for now but was seeking a new Convener.

54. Mr. Munro, Convener of the working group on publicity and funding, reported that the group had met twice in Berlin and reviewed its aims. Good progress had been made with the web site and the promotional brochure in various languages. Other proposals and suggestions had been discussed by the group. The documents to be supported for publication by the United Nations Statistics Division were under preparation, and material would be made available to the secretariat by June 2003. Mr. Laaribi noted that the United Nations was able to support two publications at present, and any further proposals should be submitted to the Convener for future publication. The Arabic Division suggested that an international day of awareness for geographical names be proposed to the United Nations. The matter was referred to the working group and the UNGEGN secretariat.

55. Mr. Lee, Convener of the working group on evaluation and implementation, reported that 14 members had attended a meeting in Berlin on 30 August 2002. The names of members were listed, and he reported that four items had been discussed: determining priorities, the action plan, publications and funding. The action plan was to determine which countries needed assistance for naming authorities, to prioritize those countries and determine how to implement the plan. An evaluation form was to be sent to group members to determine possible future changes to conferences and meetings.

56. Experts interested in the new working group on exonyms had met briefly and either Henri Dorion (USA/Canada Division) or Milan Orozen Adamic (East Central and South-East Europe Division) would convene the working group. The need for terms of reference and an action plan had also been discussed. (Orozen Adamic has since become Convener of the working group.)

57. Experts interested in the new working group on pronunciation had also met, although in two separate groups. The two groups were requested to meet together at the end of the session. (Donall Mac Giolla Easpaig of the Celtic Division has since become Convener of the working group.)

XIII. Provisional agenda for the twenty-second session

58. The agenda (working paper No. 10) was discussed and accepted, with two amendments. Additional agenda items were added after item 14 for the two new working groups. Item 16 was then deleted from the agenda.

XIV. Other business

Forms

59. Completion and return to the secretariat were requested for the contact form, the national names authorities form and the evaluation form.

Liaison with other organizations

60. The current liaison officers with ICOS, SCAR, ICA, IHO, PAIGH etc. were all to continue as at present.

UNGEGN Newsletter

61. Mr. Laaribi advised that material for the next *Newsletter* should be with the secretariat by December 2002 for a February/March 2003 issue. The *Newsletter* would only include short articles or summaries; longer articles could be published on the web site. The newsletter could be particularly helpful for the working groups. The outgoing UNGEGN Chairperson commented that his copy of the last *Newsletter* had been defective and was difficult to read. It was agreed that circulation of such material could damage the image of UNGEGN, and that quality must be maintained. The Arabic Division welcomed the *Newsletter* as a valuable way of bringing participants together, and suggested that it not be limited to conference information but that rather its contents be expanded to include national activities etc. Further support was expressed for the value of the *Newsletter* and it was suggested that the secretariat distribute copies to permanent missions, embassies etc.

Next session of UNGEGN

62. Based on previous recommendations, a shorter session (perhaps eight working days) would be considered. United Nations venues, such as Bangkok and Vienna, were noted, but unless funding was available for travel of Headquarters staff, the twenty-second session of UNGEGN would most likely be held in New York during the first half of 2004. Requests to avoid the month of August 2004 were noted.

UNGEGN web site

63. The web site had been demonstrated at the Conference, and Mr. Laaribi requested that UNGEGN members make recommendations to him for future improvements. He confirmed that Conference papers would be permanently accessible, although they would be transferred to an archival section. He also noted that missing or broken links would be verified. The Chairperson noted that the UNGEGN web site could be accessed at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo>, and that document E/CONF.94/INF.89 contained a list of web sites indicated in Conference papers. Notice of changes to convenership and membership of working groups and Chairpersons of Divisions should be sent to Mr. Laaribi to update the web site.

64. Mr. Sievers, Chairman of Germany's Organizing Committee for the Eighth Conference, reported on preparation for the Conference and the twenty-first session of UNGEGN. He outlined the work involved, and felt that hosting the Conference had been most worthwhile. The Chairperson noted that Germany had done an excellent job, and the participants at the session expressed their gratitude.

65. The Chairperson also thanked the United Nations staff from New York and Vienna, and the President, the Chairs and Rapporteurs and participants for the success of the Conference.

XV. Conclusions and recommendations

66. The meeting of UNGEGN one day before and one day after the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, achieved several goals, namely:

(a) Reporting of the seven UNGEGN working groups designated to follow up the resolutions of the Seventh Conference, held in New York in January 1998;

(b) Addressing organizational matters for the Eighth Conference;

(c) Recommending to the Economic and Social Council the amendment of the statute of UNGEGN to enhance and allow for wider representation of the UNGEGN Bureau;

(d) Planning working groups for the next five years to address the resolutions of the Eighth Conference;

(e) Reporting of those UNGEGN geographical/linguistic divisions that met during the Eighth Conference in Berlin;

(f) Recommending that the twenty-second session of UNGEGN be held in the first half of 2004;

(g) Steps were taken to promote and improve communication between experts around the world and of UNGEGN with other organizations (including updating and expanding the UNGEGN web site, continuing and more widely circulating the information bulletin, assuring liaison with other international scientific organizations and addressing continuous improvement to procedures for future meetings);

(h) The value of associating toponymy training for personnel from developing countries with Conference/UNGEGN sessions was supported by the representation of all 22 geographical/linguistic divisions at this UNGEGN session.

67. The conclusions and recommendations specific to the content of geographical names standardization are included in the resolutions and report of the Eighth Conference (see E/CONF.94/3).

Annex I

List of participating divisions

Africa Central Division
Africa East Division
Africa South Division
Africa West Division
Arabic Division
Asia East Division (other than China)
Asia South-East and Pacific South-West Division
Asia South-West Division (other than Arabic)
Baltic Division
Celtic Division
China Division
Dutch and German-speaking Division
East Central and South-East Europe Division
Eastern Europe, Northern and Central Asia Division
East Mediterranean Division (other than Arabic)
French-speaking Division
India Division
Latin America Division
Norden Division
Romano-Hellenic Division
United Kingdom Division
United States of America-Canada Division

Annex II

List of documents

<i>Symbol</i>	<i>Title/country</i>	<i>Agenda item</i>
GEGN/21/1	Provisional agenda	
GEGN/21/2	List of documents	
Working paper 1	Rapport du groupe de travail sur les noms de pays	3
Working paper 2	Report of the UNGEGN Liaison with the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research	3
Working paper 3	Report of the working group on romanization systems	3
Working paper 4	Report of the working group on terminology	3
Working paper 5	Report of the working group on publicity and funding	3
Working paper 6	Report of the working group on toponymic data files and gazetteers for the period 2000-2002	3
Working paper 7	Various elements concerned with the work of UNGEGN and the Conferences and its evaluation	4 and 7
Working paper 8	Report of the working group on evaluation and implementation	3
Working paper 9	Report of the working group on evaluation and implementation	3
Working paper 10	Provisional agenda for the twenty-second session of the Group of Experts	

Annex III

Provisional agenda for the twenty-second session of the Group of Experts

1. Opening of the session.
 2. Adoption of agenda.
 3. Report of the Chairperson.
 4. Report of the Secretary.
 5. Reports of the divisions.
 6. Reports of the liaison officers, regional meetings and international organizations.
 7. Summary reports of the working groups.
 8. Meeting of the working group on training courses in toponymy.
 9. Meeting of the working group on toponymic data files and gazetteers.
 10. Meeting of the working group on terminology.
 11. Meeting of the working group on romanization systems.
 12. Meeting of the working group on country names.
 13. Meeting of the working group on publicity and funding.
 14. Meeting of the working group on evaluation and implementation.
 15. Meeting of the working group on exonyms.
 16. Meeting of the working group on pronunciation.
 17. Toponymic guidelines for map editors and other editors.
 18. Standardization in multilingual areas.
 19. Progress made on archiving documents pertaining to the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names and to the sessions of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.
 20. Implementation of resolutions and the aims and functions of the Group of Experts.
 21. Ninth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.
 22. Twenty-third session of the Group of Experts.
 23. Other matters.
 24. Adoption of the report.
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