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Item 13 (k) of the provisional agenda*

Economic and environmental questions: cartography**Twenty-second session of the United Nations Group of
Experts on Geographical Names****Report of the Secretary-General***Summary*

The twenty-second session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, convened in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2003/294 of 24 July 2003, was held at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 20 to 29 April 2004.

The present report briefly describes the activities carried out by the session and presents its major findings and recommendations, including the recommendation that the twenty-third session of the Group of Experts be held at the United Nations Office at Vienna for six working days, between March and May 2006, with a primary focus on the importance of the work of the Group of Experts in supporting the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names and the essential contribution that the Group continues to provide to Member States in the geographical information field and related cartographic areas.

* E/2004/100.



1. The twenty-second session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, convened in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2003/294 of 24 July 2003, was held at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 20 to 29 April 2004.

2. The session was attended by 190 participants from 63 countries, representing 21 of the 22 geographical/linguistic divisions of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.¹ Fifteen observers from intergovernmental agencies, international scientific organizations, and other organizations were also present.²

3. The agenda for the twenty-second session was prepared by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names at its twenty-first session, held in Berlin (on 26 August and 6 September 2002), in conjunction with the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (27 August-5 September 2002).³ Agenda items were organized to facilitate the work of the Group of Experts in addressing and following up the resolutions of the Eighth and previous Conferences. The session considered the reports of 18 linguistic/geographical divisions on their regions and on the progress being made in the standardization of geographical names since the Eighth Conference, with particular reference to implementation of the resolutions adopted at the Conference. In addition, papers were presented and discussion took place on particular aspects pertaining to multilingual areas, including the development of policies and procedures for the collection and application of indigenous and minority group geographical names, the development of toponymic databases, the enhancement of web capabilities and the use of exonyms. Nine working groups reported and continued their activities in the fields of: training courses in toponymy, toponymic data files and gazetteers, toponymic terminology, pronunciation, romanization systems, country names, exonyms, evaluation and implementation and publicity and funding. Emphasis was put on training courses and materials, in particular on two compiled manuals to be published by the United Nations: a basic manual on national standardization of geographical names, and a technical reference manual on romanization, toponymic data transfer standards and formats and country names.

4. From the 133 documents presented as working or information papers, it was clear that considerable progress was being made in many Member States on various aspects of geographical names standardization, from creation of national toponymic guidelines and procedures to data collection in the field, creation of toponymic databases and dissemination of authoritative nationally standardized names through paper gazetteers, digital files and web-based data sets. Working groups had also made progress in developing web-based training materials, integrating geographical names data into national and regional spatial data infrastructures and developing toponymic data exchange formats. Attention was drawn to geographical names database networking through the proposed EuroGeoNames project. A special meeting was held by African Member States to establish a task force to encourage work on geographical names standardization in Africa. Despite many accomplishments, it was also noted that problems are still encountered relative to geographical names information, including the lack of detailed current inventories of local official geographical names in all Member States and continued difficulties in the application of diacritical marks in digital applications. It was agreed that collaboration with the United Nations Geographic Information Working Group and the United Nations Cartographic Section is of paramount importance and experts of

the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names were encouraged to provide information on digital names to the Cartographic Section.

5. The proceedings of the twenty-second session are to be published in one volume.

6. The present session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names ascertained that the provisional agenda and rules of procedure were in place for the Ninth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, to be held in 2007. The Group of Experts also prepared a provisional agenda (see annex to the present report) for a proposed twenty-third session at the United Nations Office at Vienna in 2006. The recommendation of Vienna as the venue for such a session was endorsed by the experts. The twenty-third session would allow the Group of Experts to follow up Group activities, facilitate and prepare the work of the Ninth Conference; a proposal for a six-day meeting was favoured by the majority of experts.

Recommendations to the Council

7. In view of the importance of the work of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names in supporting the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names, and the essential contribution it continues to provide to Member States in the geographical information field and related cartographic areas, it is recommended that the Economic and Social Council:

(a) Endorse the recommendation that the twenty-third session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names be held at the United Nations Office at Vienna for six working days, between March and May 2006, to facilitate and prepare the work of the Ninth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names;

(b) Request the Secretary-General to take measures, as appropriate, to implement the recommendation contained in paragraph (a) above.

Notes

¹ 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.

² Pan American Institute of Geography and History, Global Spatial Data Infrastructure, International Cartographic Association, International Council of Onomastic Sciences, International Hydrographic Organization, International Geographic Union, International Steering Committee for Global Mapping, Names Society of Southern Africa, Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research, and International Map Trade Association.

³ E/2003/4.

Annex

Provisional agenda for the twenty-third session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names

1. Opening of the session.
 2. Adoption of the agenda.
 3. Report of the Chairperson.
 4. Report of the secretariat of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.
 5. Reports of the divisions.
 6. Reports of the liaison officers, regional meetings and international organizations.
 7. Activities relating to the working group on training courses in toponymy.
 8. Activities relating to the working group on toponymic data files and gazetteers.
 9. Activities relating to the working group on terminology.
 10. Activities relating to the working group on romanization systems.
 11. Activities relating to the working group on country names.
 12. Activities relating to the working group on publicity and funding.
 13. Activities relating to the working group on evaluation and implementation.
 14. Activities relating to the working group on exonyms.
 15. Activities relating to the working group on pronunciation.
 16. Activities relating to the working group on the promotion of indigenous and minority group names.
 17. Toponymic guidelines for map editors and other editors.
 18. Other toponymic issues.
 19. Implementation of resolutions and the aims and functions of the Group of Experts.
 20. Preparation for the Ninth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.
 21. Provisional agenda for the twenty-fourth session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.
 22. Adoption of the report.
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