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Item 14 of the Provisional Agenda

MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP ON EVALUATION AND  
IMPLEMENTATION

Eighth Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names  
Berlin, August 2002  
Evaluation of the work of the Conference

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# UNITED NATIONS GROUP OF EXPERTS ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Eighth Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, Berlin, August 2002

## Evaluation of the work of the Conference

### Introduction

This report summarizes responses to a questionnaire survey carried out at the end of the Eighth Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names held in Berlin in August 2002. The main purpose of the questionnaire was to evaluate the work of the Conference with a view to improving the work of UNGEGN and future Conferences. Seven questions were asked and 27 respondents completed and returned the forms. In the following sections the responses to the questions are summarized.

### Question 1. What do you feel was most useful about this Conference?

- (a) Most respondents commented that the opportunity to make contacts and to share experiences contributed to a wider awareness of international trends and efforts towards standardization. They valued being able to discuss initiatives and developments with a wide range of practitioners (geographers, cartographers, linguists, etc.), including those from developing countries.
- (b) The knowledge brought by various experts on the collection, processing, storing and use of geographical names, as well as the correct spellings and pronunciation, was considered an important factor.
- (c) Having up-to-date documents from countries, indicating recent progress in different aspects of work, will definitely provide new viewpoints and solutions and contribute to further international cooperation.
- (d) Communicating experiences and confirming progress in one's own country were considered valuable.
- (e) Toponymic guidelines, information on training courses, aspects of national standardization (including atlases and gazetteers), website information, etc. were noted as meaningful.
- (f) The topical exhibition and coffee break presentations, held in conjunction with the Conference, were greatly appreciated and definitely provided a bonus that should be repeated in future.

(g) Availability of Internet access, the use of PCs, and assistance of the secretariat were felt to be very useful.

**Question 2. What do you feel could have been better or more useful? and**  
**Question 3. What changes would you like to make for the next Conference?**

**(a)** Optimal use of available *time* was very important.

- Participants felt that more time was needed for discussion on such topics as new technologies, processes, and initiatives.
- Time could be better used by avoiding political issues and only discussing matters of standardization of geographical names.
- Presentation of country reports was for some too long and it was stressed that only the most important points should be presented, or summaries read, thus allowing time for discussion. Papers should be to the point, and a maximum of 5 minutes (possibly using Powerpoint) should be allocated for their presentation.
- Less time should be spent on “information papers” intended to indicate progress on well established programs.
- Avoid repetition between country, division and working group reports.

**(b) Documents**

- It is desirable to have the documents available ahead of the day of the discussion - preferably on the UNGEGN website.
- Distribution of documents needs to be less confusing, with the Order of the Day indicating the number, title and country of the documents under each agenda item; a more logical approach to number sequencing; and papers given out by agenda item, not by number.
- Hard copy should be available to countries that cannot participate and cannot access the website. Could all documents be made available on a CD-ROM?
- Conference reports should be available promptly.
- For the next Conference, it would be helpful for the Secretariat/consultants to provide a synthesis for each agenda item, based on relevant country contributions for the Conference.
- A single set of endorsed guidelines to be followed would allow standards for convergence and comparison of progress.

**(c) Contents**

- Assistance could be provided to developing nations, perhaps using a workshop format - or a day of lectures by three experts on concepts, collection, processing, romanization.
- More information could be made available on the topics dealt with by Working Groups, on multilingual toponymy, on databases and romanization, and on training/education in toponymy.
- The UN could do more to check and make meaningful suggestions for the establishment of national committees for the standardization of geographical names.

**(d) General organization**

- Although everyone was very pleased with the location and the service received in Germany, some made suggestions in case the Conference was again held outside UN facilities - for instance, that a small restaurant for lunch be available inside the

- Conference building; that if possible, seating be in amphitheatre style with clearly visible country signs; that a separate well-ventilated smoking area be available; that a bookstore with special books or magazines about geographical names would be appreciated.
- For those participating for the first time, it would be useful to have information and guidelines about the Conference on the website, and a small group to provide assistance.
  - According to some, it would be preferable for the Conferences to be every 4 years, and UNGEGN every 2 years.
  - To prevent a rush in preparing resolutions, time should be set aside for this purpose.
  - It was suggested that the number of days for conferences could be slightly reduced.
  - It was proposed that Divisions could be better used as an integral part of the Conference structure and that there could be more coordination between Working Groups and Divisions.
  - It was noted that a Rapporteur should not have to chair a meeting; formal/informal (closed) sessions should be carefully planned by the Secretariat.

**(e) Training**

- Centres of training should be nearer to developing countries so that more can participate, and effort should be made to allow more countries to participate (in Conferences/training). To accomplish this it might be necessary to give developing countries more technical and financial support.

**Question 4. What do you see as the main goals of the UN Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names?**

- (a) It was clear from responses that the UN Conferences have tasks ahead of them. These range from coordination worldwide of standardization of geographical names to identifying emerging issues of multinational or international significance and to propose measures to address such issues. It is important for the Conferences to enable countries addressing similar problems to exchange experience and knowledge, to learn of latest progress, and to assist nations to develop appropriate levels of expertise.
- (b) Conferences should: establish and promote standards, methods, and ideals; encourage establishment of national authorities, and promote standardization; seek progressive convergence of views on standardization; harmonize, or agree on, principles of standardization and provide guidelines; reduce problems with geographical names and facilitate the exchange of toponymic data.
- (c) It was also expressed that Conferences should promote efficient communication, and strengthen international cooperation and coordination of activities. In so doing, we help preserve world culture and history through the cultural aspect of names, and support socio-economic development to improve life in the world. Worldwide participation at Conferences should be encouraged, with the aim to promote knowledge and the use of standardized geographical names.

(d) In a more specific sense, it was noted that we should assure that UN resolutions are followed, and should be able to reduce resources used/needed on updating foreign geographical names by reducing in a step-by-step way the use of exonyms. Global use of the same geographical names (i.e. worldwide use of names in their original languages) as found on some maps in the exhibition should be encouraged, and cooperation with users of geographical names promoted. Interest was expressed in names issues relative to national and world gazetteers, the creation of dictionaries, gazetteers, databases and toponymic guidelines.

**Question 5. What are the most important items that UNGEGN should undertake before the next Conference?**

**(a) Funding**

- Training for needy groups/least developed countries/those lacking experts/training courses/basic training
- Funding for trainees
- Facilitate participation of developing countries in sessions and conferences
- Provide technical assistance

**(b) Websites**

- Follow up to optimize the UNGEGN website and expand the contents with toponymic materials (programmes, teaching material, etc.) - including web-based training
- On country websites, provide clear information about standardization in each country and encourage quick and easy contacts

**(c) Documentation**

- Create templates for developing countries regarding the establishment of authorities, gazetteers, etc.
- Compile basic documents re standardization and technical issues - publish through the Secretariat
- Organize papers and information in a consistent way; e.g. documentation available regarding legislation concerning geographical names

**(d) UNGEGN**

- Increase participation of countries currently not present (from all parts of the world). Look at problems of non-participating countries (e.g. lack of information, administrative bottlenecks; funds)
- Agree on principles of standardization / single set of guidelines for all UNGEGN members to follow
- Encourage interaction
- Assist establishment of geographical names authorities in developing countries
- Monitor progress in standardization
- Create a model for work of UNGEGN divisions
- Where appropriate, rationalize divisional structures
- Spread information about the work of Working Groups

**(e) *Aspects of names standardization***

National:

- Focus on issues of collection and use of Aboriginal (indigenous) names
- Follow up where activities are emerging .. to know progress/problems/help required; monitor progress in standardization of geographical names / continue work on this theme and on the structure of toponymic databases
- Study geographical terms and creation of glossaries and dictionaries

International:

- Research into different scripts
- Propose single and reversible transliteration systems
- Reduce exonyms
- Clarify / rationalize the place naming process for Antarctica
- Compile a list of main geographical names of every country in IPA
- Harmonize definitions of object types/feature codes

**Other comments**

Other remarks were diverse, covering the following additional points:

- If possible, UNGEGN meetings should alternate between New York and Europe.
- Perhaps extended hours (9.00-18.00) would optimize available time.
- First priority for support should be given to assist developing countries
- More attention should be given to the romanization of toponyms of China, Japan, etc.
- A complete list of contact addresses and e-mails would be useful.
- Need UN information to provide enlightenment on the worth of names.
- Conference participants and UN members need stronger commitments and political will to achieve final standardization.
- Publish a manual to pass on the current expertise.
- Keep encouraging younger participants for continuity of UNGEGN.
- Sustain this work for world heritage.

**Assistance requested**

15 countries (Bhutan, Italy, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Guinea, Madagascar, Mexico, Mongolia, Myanmar, Namibia, Nigeria, Romania, Uganda, Venezuela, Vietnam, Zambia) indicated that they could use assistance in areas that they specified.