

**Twenty-third Session
Vienna, 28 March – 4 April 2006**

**Agenda item 4
Report of the UNGEGN Secretariat**

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Submitted by the UNGEGN Secretariat.

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The present report summarizes the major geographical names activities carried out by the UNGEGN secretariat during the period 2004-2006 and outlines future activities for the period 2006-2007.

A- Major activities undertaken during the period 2004-2006

Since the twenty-second session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), held in New York, 20-29 April 2004, the UNGEGN secretariat has undertaken a number of actions in pursuance of resolutions and recommendations of the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN) and the twenty-second session of the Group of Experts. In this report, we will highlight the major activities of the UNGEGN with regard to publications, support for training workshops, the database on country/city names, participation in working group activities and other important events.

1. Publications and outreach

The UNGEGN secretariat prepared and published the report of the twenty-second session of the Group of Experts (GEGN/22), as well as the last four issues of the UNGEGN Information Bulletin (Nos. 28, 29, 30 and 31). These documents were mailed to the Group of Experts, and an electronic copy of each document is available on our website at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/>.

In pursuance of resolution VIII/15, of the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, the Working Group on Publicity and Funding with contributions from the Group of Experts has developed two manuals for publication 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. Indeed, the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) has published the English version of the basic manual and continues to work on the second manual in order to publish it in the near future.

Since its development in April 2002, the UNGEGN website is updated every six months. It is worth noting that, for the first time, the technical papers of the twenty-third session of the Group of Experts were posted before the start of the session. The website is now an established means for the secretariat to communicate with the Group of Experts and the general public. The website is also improving in substance as more technical papers become available for general access, and efforts are made to add more background papers and publicize the site as much as possible. The UNGEGN secretariat greatly appreciates the constructive comments of the Group of Experts but would like to reiterate its request that changes for update of the website be sent to the secretariat in a timely manner.

2. Support for training workshops

Three training courses on toponymy took place in 2004 and 2005 and were supported by the United Nations Statistics Division: Mozambique, September 2004; Australia, October 2004; and Indonesia, September 2005. The United Nations Statistics Division also provided travel support to six participants from developing countries to participate in the training course held in Vienna, 14-27 March 2006, and to attend the current session of the Group of Experts. The Division will also support a training course scheduled for 2006 in Mozambique.

3. Building a UNGEGN database on country/city names

The twenty-second session of the Group of Experts, held in New York in 2004, supported the request from many geographical names users and from the general public to develop a UNGEGN database on country and major city names. As a result, the UNGEGN secretariat initiated the process of building a database to include country names and major city names of the world in a multilingual, multi-scriptural and geo-referenced format. The database is intended to collect, manage and disseminate names of countries and major cities with a population of more than 100,000 inhabitants, and to make the data available (including its presentation on maps) to countries, the Group of Experts and the public at large.

Work on the database started by formalizing the needs of the Group of Experts and, in particular, by defining the structure of the conceptual and logical models of the database. This was the first step before the creation of the database and the entry of basic data on country and city names. The conceptual model was sent to the UNGEGN Working Group on Country Names and the Group of Experts for review and comment. This phase of work is now completed and documented. The second step involved the construction of the database and the development of the user interface. A prototype that shows how the system functions will be presented during the current session.

The lesson learned from the prototype is that the main issues are not technical but rather related to data collection and maintenance. Indeed, it will take much time and effort to continuously collect, enter and update the basic data, especially with regard to city names. The discussion of this matter by the Group of Experts during the current session, their recommendations and particularly their involvement and commitment to provide data will be crucial for the future development of this database.

4. Working Group activities

The UNGEGN secretariat participated in the Joint Meeting of the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation and the Working Group on Publicity and Funding held in Seoul, 28-30 November 2005. The main objectives of the meeting were as follows: to review the general aims and objectives of the two Working Groups; to define the work plan and actions to be carried out by the two Working Groups; to evaluate the resolutions of the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names and propose actions to be undertaken in order to improve their implementation; to discuss actions that can make the work of the UNCSGN and UNGEGN meetings more effective; and to propose actions to help developing countries attend the twenty-third session of UNGEGN to be held in Vienna in 2006.

5. Integration of geographical names data into national and regional spatial data infrastructures

The UNGEGN secretariat is continuing to forge ties with United Nations Regional Cartographic Conferences and helped the Eighth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for the Americas to adopt a resolution (No. 4 on Policy and Reform) recommending that the “Permanent Committee on Geospatial Infrastructure for the Americas (PC-IDEA) members provide information on national policy, law or specifications to post at PC-IDEA and the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) web sites”. At the same meeting, Mr. Jörn Sievers, Vice-Chairman of the Group of Experts, presented a paper entitled “EuroGeoNames: the Vision of Integrated Geographical Names Data within a European SDI”. This paper gave an overview of EuroGeoNames, a European project initiated in pursuance of resolution VIII/6 of the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names held in Berlin, in 2002 that recommended better "integration of geographical names data into national and regional spatial data infrastructures". Mr. Sievers encouraged PC-IDEA members to participate in UNGEGN sessions and conferences.

It is important to reiterate that previous United Nations regional cartographic conferences for Asia and the Pacific as well as for the Americas recognized that standardized geographical names data should be considered in the establishment of national and regional spatial data infrastructures and included in their design, development and implementation. We would also like to mention that the UNGEGN secretariat participated in the Sixth United Nations Geographic Information Working Group (UNGIWG), held in Addis Ababa, in November 2005, and continues to collaborate actively with UNGIWG and other international bodies involved with geographic information activities.

B- Future activities

Updating the texts on the pages of the UNGEGN website is a continuous process. The UNGEGN secretariat, based on the comments provided by experts, will continue to improve the structure of its website to better reflect the diverse and interlinked areas covered by standardization of geographical names and geographic information. As mentioned before, the website is a major tool to improve communication between the Group of Experts and to enhance the preparatory activities of the UNGEGN meetings.

The UNGEGN secretariat will continue to work with the Working Group on Publicity and Funding on the Technical Reference Manual in order to ensure its publication in the first quarter of 2007.

The UNGEGN secretariat will also continue to work on the development of the UNGEGN database on country/city names, in order to present a workable database to the Ninth United Nations Conference on Geographical Names to be held in 2007. Once this process is complete, we could consider adding other major geographic features and their names, for example, rivers, lakes, seas, mountains, and so forth, provided that the necessary resources are available. The ultimate outcome would be a geographic database on country and city names, and major geographic features within a country.