

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

**Item 19 of the Provisional Agenda:
Implementation of resolutions and the aims and
Functions of the Group of Experts**

Commemorative naming practices in Helsinki, Finland

INTRODUCTION

In 2002, the extent to which commemorative names could be adopted in the planning of new place names in Helsinki, as well as the grounds for their adoption generated lively discussions both in public and in the Place Names Committee of the City of Helsinki.

Especially intensive were the discussions on long street names with personal names and titles. Other topical issues included the extent to which the persons honoured by a commemorative name were known to the public in general, and the share of commemorative names as compared with all names in use, as well as the length of the waiting period before a commemorative name could be given.

Following these discussions, the Place Names Committee of the City of Helsinki considered carefully the principles of giving commemorative names, and drafted a report of the Finnish and foreign practices and principles of commemorative names. This report was used by the Committee as a basis for discussions on the use of commemorative names in the Finnish capital Helsinki, together with the UN resolution VIII/2 Commemorative naming practices for geographical features.

The recommendation and its justifications, issued by the Place Names Committee of the City of Helsinki, can be found on the next two pages (extract from the minutes of the meeting of 15 September 2004 of the Place Names Committee of the City of Helsinki, English translation).

Commemorating individuals, companies, and communities in the planning of new place names in Helsinki

The extent to which memorial names could be adopted in the planning of new place names in Helsinki, as well as the grounds for their adoption, have generated lively discussions both in public and in the Place Names Committee of the City of Helsinki. The term ‘memorial name’ refers to names that are given in honour of an individual, event or other circumstance, but they can also be given after public utilities, companies, or public corporations, etc.

Different institutions and private persons have contacted the City of Helsinki in the hope of honouring an individual with a planned name bearing his/her name, and this has made it necessary to establish a set of common principles. The objective is to determine in what circumstances and on what grounds a memorial name, incorporated in the city plan, can be given. The Place Names Committee wishes to point out that there are other ways of honouring an individual than a memorial name. For example, memorial statues, plaques, and publications, as well as different memorial occasions and exhibitions, are worthy ways of commemorating and honouring a life’s work.

As the capital of Finland, Helsinki has a special status as compared with the other Finnish cities, and this also applies to the practices of giving memorial names. The position of Helsinki as a capital within the European cultural sphere, its long and versatile history, as well as its multicultural and multilingual nature, must be reflected in the nomenclature. Yet, streets and other places can also be named after individuals who are important in a positive manner and closely related to the city’s local history and the place to which the name is given, even if they were not widely known.

Unreasonably long and complicated planned names should be avoided; at least they should not be over represented in an area. The question of whether a memorial name should include a person’s first or last name, or both, should be considered case by case. In certain cases, a title, profession, or a nickname can be included, but the name must not be overly long.

The principles established here are in harmony with the recommendations of the UN and the Finnish Language Board.

1. **A street, square, park, or other place can be named after an individual, or to commemorate him/her, if the individual and his/her actions have been generally acknowledged as worth commemorating and**
 - a. **The individual is associated with the place to be named in a significant and positive manner, or represents its historical layering, or**
 - b. **The individual was born in Helsinki and lived there for a significant part of his/her life, or if he/she carried out his/her life's work in Helsinki, or**
 - c. **The individual is a Finn whose life's work is significant nationally or internationally.**

The individual shall be respected and acknowledged also beyond his/her own time, area of expertise, and political frame of reference.

2. **A street, square, park, or other place cannot be named after a living individual.** An individual's name can only be considered for use in a planned name **after a minimum of five years from his/her death.**
3. **A street, square, park, or other place cannot be named after public utilities, companies, or public corporations that are still in operation.** The name of a company or public corporation can be considered for use in a planned name if it operated under the same name for several generations in the same place, and if it had high local significance.
4. **Names given solely to commemorate individuals shall not be gathered in dense groups within an area.**