

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

---

**Item 8 of the Provisional Agenda:  
Activities relating to the Working Group on Toponymic  
Data Files and Gazetteers**

**Report of the Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers for the  
period 2004-2006**

---

**Prepared by the Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers**

## **Report of the Working Group on Toponymic data files and Gazetteers for the period 2004-2006**

### **Working Group Membership**

The following experts are members of the Working Group:

Mr. Milan OROŽEN ADAMIC, Slovenia  
Ms. Adela ALCÁZAR GONZÁLEZ, Spain  
Mr. Johnny ANDERSEN, Norway  
Ms. Margarita AZCÁRATE LUXÁN, Spain  
Mr. Herman BELL, Sudan  
Mrs. Caroline BURGESS, United Kingdom  
Mr. Traian CONSTANTINESCU, Romania  
Mr. Randall FLYNN, United States (convenor)  
Ms. Mária KOVÁCOVÁ, Slovakia  
Mr. Teemu LESKINEN, Finland  
Mrs. Kathleen O'BRIEN, Canada  
Mr. Peeter PÄLL, Estonia  
Mr. Trent PALMER, United States  
Mr. Juan QUIÑE VIGIL, Peru  
Mr. Jörn SIEVERS, Germany  
Ms. Vita STRAUTNIECE, Latvia  
Mr. Lou YOST, United States

### **Terms of Reference**

The Working Group was constituted in its present form during the nineteenth session of the United Nations Group of Experts.

The Working Group endeavors to promote and further the aims of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names that relate to the collection and dissemination of geographic names information as stated in the first report of the Group of Experts in 1960:

“It is recommended that names authorities publish standardized names in gazetteer form as well as on maps since much information necessary for the proper understanding and interpretation of names cannot be included readily on maps.”

This seminal recommendation has been underscored and amplified in numerous resolutions of the various United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN).

### **Work Plan**

At the 19<sup>th</sup> session of UNGEGN in New York, January 1998, the Working Group established the following outline of objectives (with modifications recommended at 8<sup>th</sup> UNCSGN in 2002):

1. Establish and maintain a Working Group web site to document and distribute news of events and developments relating to gazetteers and toponymic information exchange.
2. Maintain and revise the information contained in *Report of the Working Group on Toponymic Data Exchange Formats and Standards to the Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names*.
3. Establish liaison with the Unicode Consortium to represent the needs of the geographic information community for digital text encoding in the context of geographic names.
4. Establish contact with relevant activities under the auspices of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) to influence the development of international standards for the exchange of toponymic information.
5. Promote the implementation of practical programs of toponymic data exchange.
6. Promote and conduct toponymic data exchange workshops to address issues associated with data exchange

**Progress Against the Work Plan Since 22<sup>nd</sup> UNGEGN:**

The following points summarize activities occurring during 2004-2006:

*Objective 1 – Working Group Website*

The Working Group continues to maintain a web site <<http://www.zrc-sazu.si/ungegn/>> that can effectively serve as the means for publicizing the Group's activities, meetings, and reports. The Working Group expresses its appreciation to Mr. ADAMIC for his work in establishing the web site.

*Objective 2 – Maintenance of the Report of the Working Group on Toponymic Data Exchange Formats and Standards (E/Conf.91/CRP.11 (7<sup>th</sup> UNCISG))*

No activity during 2004-2006.

*Objective 3 – Liaison with the Unicode Consortium*

UNGEGN maintains liaison status with the Unicode Consortium. However, no substantive contact between UNGEGN and the Unicode Consortium has taken place through the Working Group since 2004.

*Objective 4 – Liaison with ISO*

UNGEGN maintains liaison status with ISO Technical Committee 211. However, no substantive contact between UNGEGN and ISO TC 211 has taken place through the Working Group since 2004.

*Objective 5 – Promote practical programs of data exchange*

No activity during 2004-2006.

*Objective 6 – Toponymic data exchange workshops*

No activity during 2004-2006.

### **Meetings of the Working Group**

There have been no meetings of the Working Group during 2004-2006. To make progress on the work plan it is essential that the Group convene a meeting prior to the 9<sup>th</sup> United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (tentatively scheduled for late August – early September 2007).

### **Future Business**

There are tasks, proposed at the 8<sup>th</sup> UNCSGN and subsequently, but to date unaccomplished, that require the Working Group's attention:

- The Working Group must assume a leading role in assisting the United Nations in the creation of its Database on Geographical Names.
- The Report of the Working Group on Toponymic Data Exchange Formats and Standards (E/Conf.91/CRP.11 (7<sup>th</sup> UNCSGN)) remains in obvious need of revision. A more substantial revision/update of this report remains to be accomplished. As reported in 2002, this major revision to the report would update character inventories for Sámi and other languages, recompilation of the report using a single Unicode-enabled software application, a complete review and update of Annex A and Annex B of the report in comparison with the Version 4 of the Unicode Standard, and an elaboration of the skeleton for toponymic data exchange guidelines that was compiled as Annex C. It is apparent that this task can only be accomplished through a collaborative arrangement among Working Group members.
- A more active liaison between the Working Group and ISO/TC 211 is required. A near-term task is the preparation of an UNGEGN Liaison Report for submittal to TC 211 for its next meeting in May 2006. Coordination with ISO on the Web Feature Service standard (and its extension toward a Gazetteer Service) is necessary.
- Liaison with the Open Geospatial Consortium (OGC) is necessary with regard to OGC's pending Gazetteer Service Profile for the Web Feature Service.
- A more active liaison between UNGEGN and the Unicode Consortium is required. Collaboration between the Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers and the Working Group on Romanization Systems (whose members possess extensive knowledge of scientific linguistics and writing systems) in the identification of Unicode-related issues would facilitate this liaison. Examples of areas needing Unicode attention:
  - Coding unitary characters for certain characters currently requiring multiple code points;
  - Filling character gaps for certain writing systems (e.g., Burmese).

- NATO's Interservice Geographic Working Group (IGeoWG) is engaged in the development and maintenance of several standards relating to geographical names & toponymic data files. The IGeoWG has expressed interest in progress being made in the compilation of a UN gazetteer, and has requested that UNGEGN consider the elaboration of a data dictionary containing standard definitions of data elements commonly used in toponymic files and databases. The Working Group may wish to consider discussion with IGeoWG on the latter topic.
- It has been suggested that the Working Group undertake the compilation of an UNGEGN "handbook on toponymic databases" that would cover, *inter alia*, design and creation of a database, challenges posed by text encoding standards, metadata standards for toponymic data, electronic dissemination of place-name information, and case studies of successful toponymic database efforts.