

Twenty-fourth Session
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Item 11 of the provisional agenda
Other business

**Proposal to create the Portuguese language Division
within UNGEGN (and proposed resolution)**

PROPOSAL TO CREATE THE PORTUGUESE LANGUAGE DIVISION WITHIN UNGEGN (AND PROPOSED RESOLUTION)

The Brazilian *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* (IBGE) is now submitting to the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names and then to the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names a resolution for the creation of the Portuguese Language Division at UNGEGN in order to create coordination among the efforts of the various Portuguese speaking countries presently willing to promote national toponymic standardization. During the United Nations International Toponymy Course held in September 2006 (in Maputo, Mozambique), representatives of Brazil, Mozambique and Angola started conversations and agreed on the need to present this proposal to UNGEGN and then to the conference, in order to strengthen their individual efforts to promote national and international standardization of geographical names and to address the common concerns of Portuguese toponymy worldwide.

Background and discussions related to the need for a Portuguese Language Division of UNGEGN

(1)

Aiming to broaden the debate on the need to implement in Brazil the United Nations resolutions for toponymic standardization, the Brazilian *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* (IBGE) is promoting discussions and training on the many issues involved. The redesign of the working plan of IBGE on geographical names started in August 2006, during the IV National Conference of Geography and Cartography, which included a round-table on the Geographic Names Data Base of Brazil (*Banco de Nomes Geográficos do Brasil – BNGB*). The most relevant partners of IBGE in the efforts related to Portuguese language concerns as well as representatives of editors participated in an informal meeting held after the round-table during which they all agreed on the need to propose the creation of the Portuguese Language Division within UNGEGN in order to strengthen national and international standardization in the Portuguese speaking countries in four regions of the world.

IBGE held round-tables, workshops and events on relevant cartographic themes during the IV National Conference on Geography and Cartography. Four main aspects of the standardization of geographical names in Brazil were brought to the round-table that had the recently designed Geographical Names Database of Brazil as its theme: (1) geocartographical information and other kinds of attributes (characteristics) of Brazilian and Portuguese language toponyms useful for Geographical Information Systems, (2) relevant issues on indigenous language toponymy and ethnohistorical aspects of Brazilian toponymy in native languages, (3) the need of toponymic guidelines for use in the Portuguese language speaking countries worldwide; (4) the example of Mozambique regarding progress made on the standardization of Portuguese language names according to the United Nations resolutions and the country's support for the idea of creating a Portuguese Language Division at UNGEGN. Besides the two local coordinators of the round-table, three experts on toponymy were invited and presented issues regarding national standardization and its intersections with the data base project led by IBGE for Brazil and Latin America. Two of them observed that the Portuguese language is the bond linking Brazil directly to seven other countries of the world, namely (in Portuguese language) **Portugal, Angola, Moçambique, Guiné-Bissau, Cabo Verde, São Tomé e Príncipe, Timor Leste.**

(2)

During 2006, IBGE has held, through its Statistics and Survey Directorate, a series of seven seminars about geographical names. The series included two special activities that targeted the concerns around the possible consensus over a worldwide toponymic standardization involving all the Portuguese language countries (and possibly even the countries that have Portuguese toponyms in its historical maps). One of the seminars was presented by the actual Brazilian Ambassador in Belize, Roberto Coutinho. Author of a consistent proposal for the rendering of foreign names in the Brazilian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Roberto Coutinho is one of the supporters of the idea of creating a Portuguese Language Division at UNGEGN to strengthen worldwide geographical names standardization. In his work dated 1999, he shows that there are not many differences in the use of geographical names by the eight Portuguese countries and that very little interference would be needed to reach consensus regarding international standardization of toponyms in all Portuguese language speaking countries.

(3)

Informal talks on the creation of the Portuguese Division at UNGEGN were also held in Maputo, during the 2006 United Nations International Toponymy Course by representatives of Brazil, Angola and Mozambique, who also counted on the experience of the observer and president of UNGEGN, Helen Kerfoot. At the end of the course in Maputo, representatives of the government of Angola declared the country's intention to hold a UN International Toponymy Course in 2008. If implemented, the course will certainly contribute to the Portuguese speaking countries joint efforts on standardization of toponyms.

(4)

Besides the advantages of common Portuguese writing and translation of documents, there are other benefits related to the creation of a Portuguese Speaking Division of UNGEGN. From the eight Portuguese speaking countries, only two are now participating in the United Nations activities on the theme and the Division will provide an incentive to bring the other six to the debate and have them interested in standardization according to the resolutions approved by the UN. Other benefits are mutual training possibilities, networking of countries in a common language, sharing of experience. It is worth remembering that the Portuguese sailors and cartographers of the XIV, XV and XVI centuries left strong signs of the Portuguese language in their cartographic documents and historical toponymy. The new Portuguese language division at UNGEGN may also help strengthening the research on heritage and historic data related to old toponyms in all continents where the old Portuguese crown had interests and build fortresses, many of which remain and are recognized by UNESCO as World Heritage. Just as examples, Portuguese language words and toponyms are still found in countries such as Canada, South Africa and India.

Documents recently prepared in Portuguese

The translation of documents to the Portuguese language is another important component of the efforts conducted in Brazil towards the a common understanding of the Portuguese language toponymic issues worldwide. With the support of PAIGH's Technical Cooperation Project on Geographical Names for Latin America, coordinated by Moema José de Carvalho Augusto, of IBGE, important documents were translated containing information on the United Nations decisions and efforts for toponymic standardization. The Portuguese language translation of the UNGEGN's *Manual for the Standardization of Geographical Names* currently being edited and published by IBGE (the printing of one thousand copies is only depending on the approval of the contract between IBGE and the United Nations). The printed translation being prepared in Brazil will be also useful in other Portuguese speaking countries willing to promote toponymic national standardization.

Other translations to Portuguese language were made possible by the toponymic cooperation between Brazil and Canada. The following materials were produced for use in a 5-day in-house training course at IBGE in Rio de Janeiro in March 2007 and include the UNGEGN brochure and two Canadian manuals. A note of thanks must be directed to Helen Kerfoot, president of UNGEGN, the PIGN team

in Canada and Brazil, and all the UN authorities who are giving instructions for the whole process of translating.

(1) The UNGEGN brochure “Consistent use of place names” (2001) – *Grupo de Peritos das Nações Unidas em Nomes Geográficos* (500 copies).

(2) The Canadian “Principles and procedures for geographical naming” (2001) – *Princípios e procedimentos para a nomeação geográfica* (200 copies).

(3) The Canadian “Guide to the field collection of native geographical names” (1992) – *Guia de coleta de campo de nomes nativos* (50 copies).

Brazil’s plans for the next years include networking with the countries of the Latin American Division of UNGEGN and also with the proposed Portuguese Speaking Countries Division. The network model will also allow the link among national and state efforts, allowing the country and the states agencies to give their full contribution to efforts on standardization of geographical names.

All the actions in Brazil counted with the work of the editors Mauro de Salles Villar, of Instituto Antônio Houaiss, Ana Maria Goulart Bustamante, of IBGE, and translator Celina Frade, of the Universidade Federal Rural do Rio de Janeiro, to whom the Brazilian publishers are very thankful. They are also thankful to the International Relations Management team of IBGE, led by Lafayette Côrtes Neto, to Dave Carney, of PIGN, and to Lidia Valles de Souza, head of the IBGE’s president’s office. Each of them had a decisive role in approving the actions on time and represent, in fact, a much greater number of people who gave support in other ways and to whom the publishers are also very thankful. Mr. Yacob Zewoldi, Mr Amor Laaribi and Ms. Sabine Kacha, of UNGEGN Secretariat, and all the UN officers contacted through them also deserve a note of thanks for all the support they are giving to all initiatives.

Proposed resolution text to be submitted for approval of the IX UNCISG

The Conference.

Considering that Portuguese-speaking countries face a common set of issues from both a toponymic and a cultural point of view, and that, for those countries, a chance to be in the same division would be likely to facilitate their participation in the work of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN),

Recommends that the following division be added to the divisions of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names:

Portuguese-speaking Division.