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Other business

Towards the Creation of A Portuguese-speaking Division of UNGEGN

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Geographical names are more than just place names on a map! They are an indispensable locational component of any spatially organized information system; they are tools for communication; and they are an essential part of our cultural heritage. Recognizing the importance of geographical names for clear communication, the United Nations has organized Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names, every five years since 1967.

Between Conferences, to promote national and international standardization of geographical names, the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) is responsible for following up the work of the Conferences. To further these efforts, UNGEGN functions through working groups and divisions. At present there are 22 divisions, based on either geographical proximity or common language requirements.

At this time, there is no division existing to meet the needs of Portuguese-speaking countries (although divisions do already exist for Dutch and German-speaking countries, for French-speaking countries and for Latin America).

During the UNGEGN Training Course held in September 2006 in Maputo (Moçambique) the creation of a Portuguese-speaking Division was discussed between representatives of Moçambique, Brasil and Angola, and Ms. Helen Kerfoot, Chairperson of UNGEGN.

There would be a number of benefits for the eight Portuguese-speaking countries (Angola, Brasil, Cabo Verde, Guiné-Bissau, Moçambique, Portugal, São Tomé e Príncipe and Timor-Leste) to establish their own UNGEGN division. Sharing a common language and aspects of history and culture, these countries could benefit from such a division, in the following ways:

- exchanging practical geographical names experiences
- providing training to participants in the various countries, which could be undertaken in Portuguese under the UNGEGN umbrella
- translating key documents on the standardization of geographical names (for reference and for training) could be coordinated and shared
- creating a greater synergy between the eight Portuguese-speaking countries to support the creation of national geographical names authorities and programmes to use official names in the national data infrastructures, and encouraging those countries not actively looking after their geographical names heritage
- enabling common efforts in the formulation of practical manuals for administrative purposes
- providing a focal point for consulting on research on historical records pertaining to geographical names in the Portuguese language
- sitting as a Portuguese-speaking Division at UNGEGN Sessions, which would facilitate informal discussion and general participation in the activities of the Session

It should be noted that countries may belong to more than one division, so the introduction of a Portuguese-speaking Division would in no way prevent the participation of a country in another division, for instance in a division of countries in geographical proximity.

A proposal for the creation of a Portuguese-speaking Division will be put forward at the 24th Session of UNGEGN on 20 August 2007 in New York. Based upon acceptance of this proposal, a resolution to this effect will be put before the Ninth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, 21-30 August 2007 in New York.