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Report of the secretariat of the Group of Experts

Report of the UNGEGN Secretariat[*]

Submitted by the UNGEGN Secretariat

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The present report summarizes the major geographical names activities carried out by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) Secretariat, United Nations Statistics Division, during the period 2007 to the first quarter of 2009. The UNGEGN Secretariat has undertaken a number of actions in pursuance of resolutions and recommendations of the Ninth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN) and the twenty-fourth session of UNGEGN, held in New York in August 2007. This report will highlight the major activities of the UNGEGN with regard to publications, outreach, support for training workshops, and the database on country/city names.

Publications

(i)   **UNGEGN Information Bulletin**: The last three issues of the UNGEGN Information Bulletin (Nos. 34, 35 and 36). Electronic copy of each document is available on the UNGEGN website at *http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/*.

(ii)   **Glossary of Terms for the Standardization of Geographical Names**: In its resolution IX/10, the Ninth UNCSGN had recommended that the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) include in its publication programme addendum pages containing additions made since 2002 to the *Glossary of Terms for the Standardization of Geographical Names* (ST/ESA/STAT/SER.M/85/Add.1). In pursuant to this resolution the UNSD facilitated the translation of the Addendum, which was prepared by the Working Group on Terminology, in the six United Nations official languages and made them available on the UNGEGN website *http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/glossary_add.htm*.

(iii)   **Postcard**: A postcard "A map, a name, a cultural identity …" was prepared for the 25th session of UNGEGN, with background theme from the venue – Kenya, to serve as an aid to create awareness geographical names among those who send and receive them and promoting names issues. The postcard was developed and prepared by the Chair of UNGEGN, through the Working Group on Publicity and Funding, and with design and technical support from the Secretariat. The postcard is part of the press kit being developed by the Working Group.

The UNGEGN website

Since 2007, the UNGEGN website (http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/default.htm) has gone through major restructuring driven by the UNGEGN Secretariat and the Chair of UNGEGN. The website is now an established means for the secretariat to communicate with the Group of Experts and the general public. The UNGEGN secretariat greatly appreciates the constructive comments of the Group of Experts on the website. Some of the steps been taken to promote and

improve communication among experts and with users of geographical names around the world are:

- more of the reports and technical documents of the nine Conferences are now available in pdf format on the UNGEGN website. This work will continue with the aim to make the website a comprehensive source of documentation.

- most of the reports and technical documents of the past UNGEGN sessions are available for general access, and efforts are made to add more background papers and publicize the site as much as possible. For instance the English texts of reports of 17 (out of 24) of the UNGEGN sessions are now available in pdf format on the website. Other languages are also available for most of the sessions and the Secretariat is working to make all languages available on-line as soon as possible.

- News and Events on the Geographic Information page of the UNSD website announces and provides brief information on UNGEGN Division and Working Group meetings at *http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/events.htm*.

- World Map-links by countries to National Names Authorities and other related websites developed by the Chair of UNGEGN and UNGEGN Secretariat is a new addition to our website.

The UNGEGN Geographical Names Database

In pursuance of resolution IX/6 of the ninth UNCSGN, the Geographical Names Database, a geo-referenced database to store the names of countries and major cities in different languages, has been further developed by UNGEGN in collaboration with UNSD. The Expert Group is continuously collecting new information on geographical names and ensures that only accurate and reliable data is being processed.

After focusing on including the country names in the official language(s) of the country and the six official United Nations languages, sourced from UNGEGN and the United Nations, the work is now concentrating on making available city names in different languages. As a first step, the capital cities have been included in the database. This work is about to be completed. The United Nations Multilingual Terminology Database has been a key data source for capital city names. UNGEGN, through the Convenors of the Working Groups on Country Names and on Romanization Systems, has verified and provided endonyms for capitals for the United Nations member states.

As of end of March 2009, UNGEGN collected the city names for 52 countries including language variations, geographical information and details about the source. The database holds information for 193 countries and about 1900 cities for which 4200 names have been stored so far. In addition, Romanized names are available for about 600 cities, based on more than 30 Romanization systems. In order to assist the user with the pronunciation of the city names in the

various languages, UNGEGN attempts to acquire sound files for as many geographical names as possible. So far about 20 countries have supplied this type of information.

The database and web application are under constant development to meet the requirements of a growing collection of geographical names and their dissemination. This ensures that the application is capable of storing, retrieving and displaying the geographical information online.

The application development will continue to meet the requirements of the growing collection of geographical names. The current focus, however, is to store the information provided on city names, in the database so that it is archived in an organized way and easily retrievable. It is planned to make this valuable data collection available to the public in due course. Experts as well as the general public can then access and review the country and city names in different languages from all over the world. For further information please contact *geoinfo_unsd@un.org*.

Support for training workshops

The United Nations Statistics Division has continued to provide funding for participation in toponymic training courses. The Division provided travel support to fifteen participants from developing countries to participate in training courses on toponymy that took place in Tunisia, April 2007; France, June 2007; Austria, May 2008; Burkina Faso, August 2008, and Romania, September 2008. the Division is also supporting the participation of 5 experts from developing countries at the Toponymy Training Workshop, 1 to 3 May 2009 and the 25th session of UNGEGN in Nairobi.

Future activities

Updating the UNGEGN website is a continuous process. The UNGEGN secretariat, based on the comments provided by experts, will continue to improve the structure and contents of its website to better reflect the diverse and interlinked areas covered by standardization of geographical names and geographic information.

The UNGEGN secretariat will continue to work with the Working Group on Publicity and Funding on the press kit to assist countries in promoting the standardization of their geographical names and the work of the Group of Experts.

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 in the shortest possible time. Once this process is complete, we could consider adding other major geographic features and their names 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.