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**25th Session of the
UNITED NATIONS GROUP OF EXPERTS ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
UN Headquarters, Nairobi, 12th May 2009**

**Geographical names experts meeting in Nairobi stress the need to
standardize place names for the benefit of the wider community**

Nairobi - On 12th May 2009 the 25th Session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) drew to a close at the UN Headquarters in Nairobi. A total of 145 geographical names experts from 22 of the 23 linguistic/geographical Divisions of the UNGEGN came together for six days to discuss the benefits to be gained from the national standardization of geographical names. In all, over 100 papers and special presentations were considered by names experts who also took part in a series of workshops on various aspects of the technical treatment of place-names.

At the opening of the Session Under-Secretary Achim Steiner, Director General of the United Nations Office in Nairobi, emphasized “the important role of place-names in developing the economy and infrastructure of Africa,” a theme developed by a number of speakers touching on issues that ranged from the handling of geographical names data files to the compilation of guidelines for map editors and the promotion of the recording and use of indigenous, minority and regional language group names. Highlighting the need for geographical names standardization was a recurring theme addressed initially by opening guest speaker Pali Lehohla, Chairperson of the UN Statistical Commission and Statistician-General of Statistics South Africa, who spoke on the statistical perspective of geographical names standardization with special reference to South Africa.

Delegates heard about the launch of a new multilingual and multi-scriptural world database of country names, capitals and major cities with audio capability to be accessible on the UNGEGN website. They were also encouraged to learn of progress in establishing national names authorities, for example, in Afghanistan which is rebuilding its administration of geographical names. Place-names in the context of national and local heritage also featured in a number of reports which touched on educational and community-based projects in countries such as Australia, Norway and Finland.

The first Session to be held in Africa since the UNGEGN held its inaugural meeting in 1960, the 25th Session in Nairobi was particularly designed to support and promote the administration of geographical names among the 53 countries of the African continent. In this context, special reference was made to names training courses recently held in Africa, potential links with regional organizations such as the African Union and the development by the UN Economic Commission for Africa of a prototype geographical names database that could be utilised by names authorities and other users throughout Africa. Geographical names issues in Africa also featured strongly in an exhibition of

posters organized by the UN Economic Commission for Africa in association with the UN Statistics Division and the winners of a new Toponymy Contest held in Africa were announced and prizes presented to winners from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Algeria and Egypt.

In looking forward to the 26th Session of the UNGEGN to be held in 2011 Ms Helen Kerfoot, UNGEGN Chairperson, invited experts to “extend a hand to our colleagues from developing countries so that they can build their own national programs,” stressing that in our globalized and digital world “the need still exists – perhaps – with even a stronger sense of urgency - for clear unambiguous nationally approved geographical names available for all potential users.”

For further information on the activities of the UNGEGN and copies of the Working Papers presented:

UNGEKN Website: unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo

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