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## **UN Experts Meet in Vienna to Discuss the Benefits to be Gained From the National Standardization of Geographical Names**

VIENNA, 2 May (UN Information Service) – From 2-6 May 2011 the 26th Session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) will be held in the Vienna International Centre. The meeting, which is organized by the UN Statistics Division (UNSD) of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), brings together experts from all corners of the world to discuss ways in which the standardization of place names is being advanced for the benefit of governments, non-governmental organizations and the general public.

One of the seven standing expert bodies of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), with over 400 members from more than 100 countries, UNGEGN continues the essential work of geographical names standardization begun more than 50 years ago in 1960 when the first Expert Group met in New York with a view to promoting more effective communication worldwide. Between the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names held at five-year intervals, UNGEGN holds its own sessions and carries out its work through the activities of 23 linguistic/geographical Divisions, and 12 Working Groups and special task teams. By bringing together names experts from UN member states and by encouraging the national collection, storage and authorization of place names, UNGEGN is able to facilitate the development and dissemination of principles, policies and methods suitable for resolving the problems of consistency in the use of geographical names.

The availability of accurate, clear and unambiguous nationally approved geographical names is basic to national and international communication, particularly in the modern digital world where names are distributed on the internet and where names are used to link geo-referenced data sets. Geographical names are fundamental to almost every aspect of the life of a nation, from the creation of national data infrastructures in support of planning, economic development and communications systems to tourism, environmental management, natural hazard prediction and the coordination of emergency services.

In addition to the presentation of over 90 working papers on technical and cultural toponymic issues, the Group will discuss international standards, and address the challenges of making standardized geographical names available for disaster response. A media kit, to be launched in Vienna, will assist in the process of promoting an awareness of geographical names issues and the work of UNGEGN, particularly in the countries of Africa.

In summarizing the efforts made in advancing the standardization of geographical names around the world over the past half century, UNGEGN Chairperson Helen Kerfoot recently noted that while “global expectations are for correct and authoritative information to be available virtually on demand” in our modern high-tech world, “the challenges we face today remain as thought-provoking as in the past.”

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For more information contact:

**Stefan Schweinfest**

UNGEGN Secretariat

Email: [schweinfest@un.org](mailto:schweinfest@un.org)

UNGEGN website: [unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo)

UNGEGN Secretariat: [geoinfo\\_unsd@un.org](mailto:geoinfo_unsd@un.org)