Summary

The twenty-seventh session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names was held at United Nations Headquarters in New York on 30 July and 10 August 2012, in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2011/251.

The present report describes the activities of the session and presents the major findings of the Group of Experts, focusing primarily on the importance of its work in supporting United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names and the essential assistance it continues to afford Member States in the geospatial information field and related cartographic areas.
I. Matters calling for action by the Economic and Social Council or brought to its attention

Draft decision for adoption by the Council

1. The United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names recommends to the Council the adoption of the following draft decision:

Report of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names on its twenty-seventh session, and the provisional agenda and dates for the twenty-eighth session

The Economic and Social Council:

(a) Takes note of the report of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names on its twenty-seventh session;

(b) Decides that the twenty-eighth session of the Group of Experts shall be held in the first half of 2014, preferably in Bangkok, and approves the provisional agenda for the session as set out below:

Provisional agenda for the twenty-eighth session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names

1. Adoption of the agenda and of the provisional programme of work.
4. Reports of the divisions.
5. Report of the liaison officers and international organizations.
6. Activities relating to the Task Team for Africa.
8. Activities relating to the Working Group on Training Courses in Toponymy.
10. Activities relating to the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology.
13. Activities relating to the Working Group on Publicity and Funding.
16. Activities relating to the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage.
17. Toponymic guidelines for map and other editors for international use.

18. Other toponymic issues.


21. Adoption of the report.

II. Reports of the working groups

A. Report of the Working Group on Publicity and Funding

2. Working paper No. 3 reported on a meeting of the Working Group held in conjunction with the first meeting of the United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management initiative in Seoul in 2011. A suggestion was made that the Group of Experts entry on the Wikipedia website be enhanced and updated, and the paper mentioned the financial support secured for some attendees at the Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. Peder Gammeltoft is the new Convener of the Working Group.

B. Report of the Working Group on Training Courses in Toponymy

3. Working paper No. 5 catalogued a number of toponymic training courses held since 2007, including courses sponsored by the Group of Experts in Ouagadougou, Yaoundé, Nairobi and Timisoara, Romania, as well as other international training courses held under the auspices of the Pan American Institute of Geography and History. A course is scheduled to take place in Indonesia in September 2012. Online training materials are being developed in English, French and Spanish. An expert from the Arabic Division enquired about training courses and materials being made available in Arabic, and an expert from the Africa West Division enquired about the outcome and efficacy of the Working Group’s activities in Africa. These discussions were followed by a demonstration of the toponymic course website developed in English.

C. Report of the Working Group on Exonyms

4. The results of Working Group meetings in Austria and Poland were described in working paper No. 7. There were deep discussions on the exonym/endonym divide and sea names and dissatisfaction among some members with the current (2007) definitions of exonym and endonym. It was reported that the meeting in Poland was held in conjunction with the Working Group on Romanization Systems.
D. Report of the Working Group on Romanization Systems

5. Working paper No. 8 discussed romanization systems for Belarusian, Bulgarian, Persian and Ukrainian that were to be considered for adoption at the Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. The importance of the reversibility and implementation of romanization systems was examined, as was the Working Group’s collaboration with other organizations within and outside the Group of Experts. The Chair enquired into the working group on romanization systems set up by the International Organization for Standardization, which the Working Group was monitoring.

E. Report of the Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers

6. The scope of work and objectives of the Working Group were examined in working paper No. 10. Progress on the objectives included maintaining liaison with international standardization bodies and United Nations agencies, promoting and assisting national spatial database infrastructure efforts and organizing workshops in conjunction with sessions of the Group of Experts and Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names. A number of upcoming actions were presented, including support for the United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management initiative and continued support for toponymic training courses.

F. Report of the Working Group on the Promotion of the Recording and Use of Indigenous, Minority and Regional Language Group Geographical Names

7. Working paper No. 12 summarized the Working Group’s activities and workplan. These included the difficulties in setting guidelines for the field collection of indigenous, minority and regional language group names, and initiating dialogues with other working groups in the Group of Experts. A change in the name of the Working Group was proposed, and a future scope of action that included a possible draft resolution was mentioned. In response to a question from the Chair, it was reported that a definition of an indigenous name was to be discussed at the next Working Group meeting. An expert from the Romano-Hellenic Division mentioned two conferences on indigenous names, one held in Norway and another to be held in Canada.


8. The results of a joint meeting with the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation and the Working Group on Publicity and Funding held in Seoul were the main topic of working paper No. 13. Results included an evaluation of the twenty-sixth session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (see para. 9). A French-language version of the database for resolutions of the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names was presented. It was announced that Sungjae Choo was the new Convener of the Working Group.
Evaluation of the twenty-sixth session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names: a review of the questionnaire survey results

9. The analysis of the results of a survey given to the Group of Experts at its twenty-sixth session was the focus of working paper No. 14. It was agreed that the simplification of the survey resulted in a greater number of respondents. The overall assessment of the session was very positive, and most but not all respondents favoured the five-day format. The Group’s most important goals were identified as its nature as a forum for discussion and the provision of updates on the standardization of geographical names. The hope was expressed that the survey results would help in the planning of future sessions and conferences.

H. Report of the Working Group on Toponymic Guidelines for Map and Other Editors for International Use

10. The coordinator of the Working Group presented working paper No. 15, which announced a new set of toponymic guidelines presented by Ukraine and updated guidelines from Finland, Germany and Poland. Several other countries have announced that they are developing or updating toponymic guidelines, and all other Member States are encouraged to do so. Two new suggestions to the online template for toponymic guidelines were incorporated. The observer from Google noted that toponymic guidelines are perhaps the most crucial part of the mandate of the Group of Experts with regard to geographic information and mapping companies.

I. Report of the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology

11. Working paper No. 17 discussed the background of the Working Group, including the 2002 glossary and its addendum in 2007, its recent meetings and its collaboration with the International Council of Onomastic Sciences. The development of an online database of toponymic terminology was discussed, and a “proof-of-concept” version of the database was demonstrated. It was noted that in this developmental stage, the database has yet to fully address problems in UTF-8 Unicode formatting with regard to Chinese and Arabic scripts. In response to a question from an expert in the Arabic Division, it was noted that the workplan is to make the database available in all six official languages of the United Nations.


12. The Convener of the Working Group on Country Names reported on its meeting in working paper No. 18 and on the updating process used for the country names document presented at the Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. Minor alterations to the text were required in order to correct errors and provide updates, and a major formatting change involved the removal of the section entitled “Names used by national authorities”. That section has been replaced by the working paper entitled “Lists of country names provided by national and other authorities” (E/CONF.101/26/Rev.1).

13. The Working Group has also been involved in providing country names and advice on city names for use in the Group of Experts World Geographical Names database.
K. Report of the Task Team for Africa

14. The report was presented on behalf of the Coordinator as working paper No. 20. The report focused on the meetings held since the previous Group of Experts session. The adoption of the Gaborone Action Plan at the meeting held in Botswana in November 2011 was mentioned, as was the review of that plan at a subsequent meeting held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in April 2012. The undertaking by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the African Union Commission to become more involved in promoting the benefits of the standardization of geographical names was discussed, as was the agreement that the topic of geographical names would be included in ECA meeting agendas.

L. Report of the Working Group on Pronunciation

15. The Convener of the Working Group on Pronunciation reported on its activities in working paper No. 21. The report summarized the main aim of the Working Group, which is to encourage the inclusion of guides to pronunciation, using both written and audio methods. The meetings held since the previous conference were also summarized.

16. The Working Group encouraged the use of a written pronunciation guide in printed gazetteers and recommended the use of the International Phonetic Alphabet for that purpose. Digital audio files for pronunciation were encouraged for inclusion in web-based and digital gazetteers.

III. Reports of the liaison officers

A. International Cartographic Association

17. The liaison officer for the International Cartographic Association reported, in working paper No. 4, the involvement of members of the Group of Experts on Geographical Names in the 2009 and 2011 International Cartographic Conferences, during which two sessions in each conference were devoted to toponymy. Helen Kerfoot, as Chair of the Group of Experts, delivered a keynote address at the 2009 conference and was also awarded an honorary fellowship by the International Cartographic Association at the ninth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

B. Establishment of an International Geographical Union/International Cartographic Association Commission/Working Group on Toponymy

18. Working paper No. 6 reported on the creation of a joint Commission on Toponymy by the International Geographical Union and the International Cartographic Association to focus on standardization issues for geographers and cartographers and the recognition by this Commission to maintain contact with and support the efforts of the Group of Experts.
C. **Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers**

19. The liaison officer for the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers presented working paper No. 9, which summarized the assistance given by the Group of Experts to the Corporation in relation to the use of geographical names as first-level domain names, in particular with the use of non-Roman scripts. It was noted that countries themselves should be in a position to provide the required linguistic and toponymic expertise. It was reported that collaboration had been undertaken to provide guidelines to the Corporation and that there were a few situations in which the specific advice of the Group of Experts had been sought.

D. **International Council of Onomastic Sciences**

20. The liaison officer for the International Council of Onomastic Sciences outlined in working paper No. 11 the history of the Council, together with an open invitation to any interested individuals to become members. He mentioned the journal *Onoma* and the regular newsletters, as well as the recent Twenty-fourth Congress held in Barcelona, Spain, where the Chair of the Group of Experts gave a keynote address. The next Congress will be held in Glasgow, Scotland, in 2014.

21. Also discussed was the International Council of Onomastic Sciences Working Group on Terminology and its cooperation with the Group of Experts Working Group on Terminology.

E. **Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research Composite Gazetteer of Antarctica**

22. Working paper No. 16 was presented on behalf of the liaison officer with the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research. The report advised that there are now 38 consultative parties to the Antarctic Treaty. The Scientific Committee’s Composite Gazetteer, jointly managed by Australia and Italy, is regarded as the most complete and up-to-date list of existing places names in Antarctica. The toponymic issues associated with the compilation of the gazetteer were outlined.

F. **Pan American Institute of Geography and History**

23. Working paper No. 19 was presented by the liaison officer with the Pan American Institute of Geography and History. The report focused on the three training courses held since the previous conference, in Ecuador in 2008, Spain in 2009 and Honduras in 2012. It was noted that the course held in Spain in 2009 was the first time that the training had been undertaken outside the member countries of the Institute.

24. The development and anticipated release, in late 2012, of an online version of the training course was mentioned as a major project of the Institute. The development of an integrated geographical names data system for the Latin American community was also mentioned as a possible future goal.
IV. Organizational matters concerning the Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

25. The Chair presented two papers to the session, the provisional agenda (E/CONF.101/1) and the draft organization of work (E/CONF.101/INF/3). He thanked the secretariat for the work undertaken in the preparation of the Conference and the relevant documents.

26. The Chair advised that, with respect to the previous Conference, the work would be divided between plenary meetings and the four technical committees. The work programme was outlined, and included a number of special presentations that would also be given during the Conference.

27. Both the provisional agenda and the draft organization of work were considered suitable without change.


V. Review of the statute of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names

29. The Chair presented the document entitled “Statute and rules of procedure of the Group of Experts on Geographical Names” (GEGN 27/3) and mentioned changes already being implemented, such as the separation of the Asia South-East and Pacific South-West Division into the Asia South-East Division and the Pacific South-West Division, and other probable changes to come. No further material was discussed, and no further comments were made from the floor.

VI. Election of officers

30. Following statements by representatives of the Norden Division and the Dutch- and German-speaking Division, respectively, the Group of Experts unanimously agreed to elect the following members to its bureau for the period 2012-2017:

Chair:
Bill Watt (Australia)

Vice-Chairs:
Ferjan Ormeling (Netherlands)
Naima Friha (Tunisia)

Rapporteurs:
Peder Gammeltoft (Denmark)
Trent Palmer (United States of America)

31. The newly elected Chair expressed his gratitude for the trust placed in him to guide the activities of the Group of Experts and pledged to do his best to advance the work of the Experts.
VII. Planning for the implementation of the recommendations of the Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

32. No comments were made under this agenda item.

VIII. Provisional agenda for the twenty-eighth session

33. The provisional agenda for the twenty-eighth session (GEGN/27/11) was approved with a change in the name of the Working Group on the Promotion of the Recording and Use of Indigenous, Minority and Regional Language Group Geographical Names to the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage.

IX. Other business

34. Working paper No. 2 was presented and contained a proposal to split the Asia South-East and Pacific South-West Division into the Asia South-East Division and the Pacific South-West Division. Working paper No. 1 was not considered by the Group of Experts during the session.

35. A proposal was put forth by the convener of the Working Group on the Promotion of the Recording and Use of Indigenous, Minority and Regional Language Group Geographical Names to change the name of the working group to the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage, with the workplan as follows:

(a) Emphasize the relationship between geographical names and cultural heritage and encourage Member States to expand geographical names databases and gazetteers to incorporate information related to cultural heritage, such as:

(i) Language source;
(ii) Use of appropriate orthography;
(iii) Historical variations;
(iv) Pronunciation;
(v) Meaning/derivation;
(vi) Connection to oral history storylines;
(vii) Indigenous, minority and regional language group geographical names;
(viii) Traditional feature extents and temporal aspects;

(b) Expand the current version of summary reports of indigenous, minority and regional geographical names projects to include any project aimed at strengthening or emphasizing the relationship between cultural heritage and geographical names;
(c) Compile a set of documents and guidelines relating to cultural projects, including field collection methodology for both geographical names and related cultural data;

(d) Initiate dialogue between the Group of Experts and other national and international groups and academic bodies involved in the recognition of the relationship between geographical names and cultural heritage to further the work on the standardization of geographical names.

X. Conclusions, recommendations and decisions

36. The twenty-seventh session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, held one day before and one day after the Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, achieved the following goals:

(a) The presentation of reports by the 10 working groups, the Coordinator of Toponymic Guidelines for Map and Other Editors for International Use and the Task Team for Africa, designated to follow up on the resolutions of the Ninth Conference;

(b) The discussion of organizational matters for the Tenth Conference, including questions related to the technical committees required, and new proposals for the consideration of country and division reports;

(c) The presentation of reports by the Group of Experts liaison officers with international organizations, and the confirmation or reappointment of officers for the next five years;

(d) The election of the Chair of the Group of Experts and other bureau members to direct the work of the Group until the Eleventh Conference;

(e) The planning of the activities of the working groups and other processes to address the resolutions of the Tenth Conference;

(f) The presentation of reports by geographical/linguistic divisions and working groups of the Group of Experts that met during the Tenth Conference in New York;

(g) The recommendation that the twenty-eighth session of the Group of Experts be held in the first half of 2014 in an Asian country.

37. The conclusions and recommendations specific to the content of geographical names standardization are included in the resolutions and the report of the Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (E/CONF.101/144).

38. The Group of Experts decided to establish two new divisions, namely, the Asia South-East Division and the Pacific South-West Division. Consequently, the Asia South-East and Pacific South-West Division ceased to exist. It was noted that existing projects, such as the Regional Gazetteer and Map, would remain active as joint projects between the two divisions.

39. In related action, the Group of Experts decided to amend its statute and rules of procedure to reflect the change in the number and the status of its divisions.
XI. Organization of the session

A. Introduction


B. Attendance

41. The session was attended by 279 participants representing the geographic/linguistic divisions of the Group of Experts (see annex I). The list of participants is contained in document GEGN/27/4.

C. Officers of the session

42. The Officers of the session at the first and second meetings, on 30 July 2012, were as follows:

Chair:
Helen Kerfoot (Canada)

Vice-Chairs:
Brahim Atoui (Algeria)
Ferjan Ormeling (Netherlands)

Rapporteurs:
William Watt (Australia)
Leo Dillon (United States of America)

United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names secretariat:
Stefan Schweinfest, Chief, Statistics Division Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Sabine Warschburger, Statistician, Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Secretary:
Sergei Cherniavsky, Chief, Disarmament and Peace Affairs Branch, Department for General Assembly and Conference Management

Deputy Secretary:
Jullyette Ukabilia, Political Affairs Officer, Disarmament and Peace Affairs Branch, Department for General Assembly and Conference Management

43. The Officers of the session elected at the third meeting on 10 August 2012, were as follows:

Chair:
Bill Watt (Australia)

Vice-Chairs:
Ferjan Ormeling (Netherlands)
Naima Friha (Tunisia)
Rapporteurs:
   Peder Gammeltoft (Denmark)
   Trent Palmer (United States of America)

For the names of the Chairs of the divisions, see http://unstats.un.org/unsd/
geoinfo/UNEGGN/divisions.html. The Officers of the working groups were:

Task Team for Africa
Convener:  
   Brahim Atoui

Working Group on Training Courses in Toponymy
Convener:  
   Ferjan Ormeling

Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers
Convener:  
   Pier-Giorgio Zaccheddu

Working Group on Toponymic Terminology
Convener:  
   Staffan Nyström

Working Group on Romanization Systems
Convener:  
   Peeter Päll

Working Group on Country Names
Convener:  
   Leo Dillon

Working Group on Publicity and Funding
Convener:  
   David Munro

Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation
Convener:  
   Ki-Suk Lee

Working Group on Exonyms
Convener:  
   Peter Jordan

Working Group on Pronunciation
Convener:  
   Dónall Mac Giolla Easpaig

Working Group on the Promotion of the Recording and Use of Indigenous, Minority 
and Regional Language Group Geographical Names
Convener:  
   William Watt
D. Opening of the session

44. On behalf of the Chair, Helen Kerfoot (Canada), the Vice-Chair, Ferjan Ormeling (Netherlands), opened the twenty-seventh session of the Group of Experts on 30 July 2012. In the course of the session, the Group held three meetings.

45. Paul Cheung, Director of the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, made an opening statement summarizing the recent accomplishments and highlights of the Group of Experts.

46. In his opening remarks, the Chair summarized the main tasks ahead, including making the best use of current technologies to enhance the work of the Group.

E. Adoption of the agenda

47. Also at its first meeting, on 30 July, the Group of Experts adopted its provisional agenda (GEGN/27/1) without change, as follows:

1. Opening of the session.
2. Adoption of the agenda.
4. Reports of the liaison officers.
7. Election of officers.
8. Planning for the implementation of the recommendations of the Tenth Conference.
9. Working groups for future requirements.
11. Other business.

48. At the same meeting, the Group of Experts adopted its organization of work (GEGN/27/10).

F. Adoption of the report

49. At its third meeting, on 10 August 2012, the Group of Experts authorized its Rapporteurs to prepare, in consultation with the bureau and secretariat of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, a report on the activities of its twenty-seventh session for submission to the Economic and Social Council.
50. Thanks were expressed to the Chair, the Vice-Chairs, Rapporteurs, working group Conveners and Rapporteurs and secretariat and conference service staff for their contributions to the session. Special thanks were given to Ms. Kerfoot, who retired as Chair of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names after serving for 10 years as Vice-Chair and 10 years as Chair.
Annex I

List of participating divisions

Africa Central Division
Africa East Division
Africa South Division
Africa West Division
Arabic Division
Asia East Division (other than China)
Asia South-East and Pacific South-West Division
Asia South-West Division (other than Arabic)
Baltic Division
Celtic Division
China Division
Dutch- and German-speaking Division
East Central and South-East Europe Division
Eastern Europe, Northern and Central Asia Division
East Mediterranean Division (other than Arabic)
French-speaking Division
India Division
Latin America Division
Norden Division
Portuguese-speaking Division
Romano-Hellenic Division
United Kingdom Division
USA/Canada Division
## Annex II

### List of documents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Title/country</th>
<th>Agenda item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GEGN/27/1</td>
<td>Provisional agenda</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEGN/27/2</td>
<td><em>Not issued</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEGN/27/3</td>
<td>Statute and rules of procedure of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEGN/27/4</td>
<td>List of participants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEGN/27/5</td>
<td>List of documents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEGN/27/6</td>
<td><em>Not issued</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEGN/27/7</td>
<td>Contact information on national geographical names authorities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEGN/27/10</td>
<td>Draft organization of work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEGN/27/11</td>
<td>Provisional agenda for the twenty-eighth session</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W.P.1</td>
<td>Proposition de la création d’une nouvelle division géographico-linguistique pour l’Afrique du Nord</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W.P.2</td>
<td>Proposal to split Asia South-East and Pacific South-West Division into Asia South-East Division and Pacific South-West Division</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W.P.3</td>
<td>Report of the Working Group on Publicity and Funding</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W.P.4</td>
<td>Report of the liaison officer with the International Cartographic Association 2007-2012</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W.P.6</td>
<td>Establishment of an International Geographical Union/International Cartographic Association Commission/Working Group on Toponymy</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol</td>
<td>Title/country</td>
<td>Agenda item</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W.P.9</td>
<td>Liaison with the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W.P.14</td>
<td>Evaluation of the twenty-sixth session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names: a review of the questionnaire survey results</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W.P.15</td>
<td>Toponymic guidelines for map editors and other editors for international use, report of the Coordinator</td>
<td>8 (e)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W.P.16</td>
<td>Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research Composite Gazetteer of Antarctica</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W.P.19</td>
<td>Report of the liaison officer with the Pan American Institute of Geography and History</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W.P.20</td>
<td>Report of the Task Team for Africa</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>