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## Importance of Geographical Names Emphasized as Experts Conclude Twenty-ninth Session in Bangkok

### PRESS RELEASE

BANGKOK, 29 April (United Nations Statistics Division) — The twenty-ninth Session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names concluded on 29 April at the United Nations Conference Centre in Bangkok.

A total of 180 experts on geographical names from 22 of 24 linguistic/ geographical divisions of the Group of Experts and 49 Member States came together over five days and discussed and shared practices, methodologies and new developments in the national standardization of geographical names. Also addressed were the modernization of the Group's working methods, strengthening its substantive relationship with United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) and the implementation of resolutions from the tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. The progress made regarding those resolutions will be reviewed at the eleventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, to be held in August 2017 at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

While considering more than 85 working papers and six special presentations, the experts also took part in a workshop on Commemorative Naming. The special technical presentations, "3-Word Addresses as a Global Location Reference System", "Innovation in Naming: Case Studies and Challenges for Geographic Names in 2016" and "Progress and challenges of space technology applications in Asia and the Pacific" were well received, stimulating insightful questions and comments that led to new and strengthened synergies among represented organizations.

Marking two milestones for the global community, the session was held in Asia for the first time, therefore achieving the objectives of having more Member States from the region participating and increasing the awareness of geographical names standardization, and was, for the first time, streamed live. Paul Woodman, from the United Kingdom, welcomed that new feature and shared his appreciation with the Secretariat, "I watched more than 15 hours of it live, and it was just like being there in person. It was quite remarkable! The proceedings were of course of great interest to me anyway, but the bonus of being able to follow it live was that I could send a message instantly to [...] another expert if something particular occurred to me at the time. It made me feel really involved, even though I am 5,000 miles away in the UK."

The session ended with the group of experts adopting 17 decisions which are to be brought to the attention of the United Nations Economic and Social Council. The decisions ranged from agreeing to review the Group's working methods for possible adoption at the eleventh Conference in 2017 to encouraging the production of an advance toponymy manual consisting of 44 themes to be made freely available on the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names website in 2017. The latter action would take note of the potential of geospatial data, including standardized geographical names, in supporting the geospatial dimension in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The adopted texts also urged countries with non-Roman script languages that had not yet had United Nations-approved systems to devise, implement and submit their national systems of romanization for approval at forthcoming United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names. One decision supported the establishment of a World Geographical Names Day in 2017 to highlight the importance and relevance of the Group of Experts and the standardization of geographical names.

Standardization of geographical names is of vital importance and the reason why the work of the Group of Experts remains most relevant, not just in Asia, but worldwide.

For additional information on the twenty-ninth session, visit

<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/ungegnSession29.html>

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