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

Review of the statute of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names*

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A review of the statute of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names has been discussed on several occasions, first on a Norden Division meeting in Oslo, Norway, in 2005 (initiated by Ms Sirkka Paikkala from Finland), and last in the joint group meeting in Copenhagen in Denmark on September 9, 2015. In the 2015-meeting the participants were the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage, the Working Group for Evaluation and Implementation and the Working Group for Publicity and Funding and the Norden Division.

The experts attending the meeting in Copenhagen agreed on a need to include the notion *geographical names as cultural heritage* in the statute, while this notion permeates many of the UNGEGN activities today. The suggested changes would stress e.g. the importance of collecting and recording names not only for cartographic purposes but also for cultural reasons. When the authorities show interest in the names, and the background of the names given by local inhabitants, and when the names are recorded in a linguistically correct manner, the users of the names are shown respect and thus encouraged to preserve the names themselves.

We suggest three additions to the statute as follows:

- *I AIMS: The basic aims of the Group of Experts are: (a..f), g. To emphasize, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, respecting the equality between peoples and languages, the significance of geographical names as a part of the historical and cultural heritage and identity of nations.*
- *II PRINCIPLES: (1-3), 4. The Group of Experts in its activities shall adhere to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and to the following provisions: (a..b), c. The standardization of geographical names must be conducted paying attention to the inherited geographical names and their significance in the preservation of local, regional and national heritage and identity.*
- *III FUNCTIONS: Functions of the Group of Experts are: (1-7), 8 To increase the awareness and respect for different languages, nations and cultures in an equal manner by promoting the use of geographical names which have been standardized on national basis and which therefore respect local, regional and national heritage and identity. (9-14).*