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Agenda item 18 (i)

Economic and environmental questions: geospatial information

Report of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names on the work of its thirtieth session

(New York, 7 and 18 August 2017)

Summary

The thirtieth session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names was held at the United Nations headquarters in New York on 7 and 18 August 2017, in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2016/259.

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 standardization of geographical names and related areas of cartography and geographical information management.



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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 thirtieth session, and dates for the next United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names meeting on the Standardization of Geographical Names

The Economic and Social Council:

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

(b) Decides that the next United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names meeting on the Standardization of Geographical Names shall be held over a five-day period from 29 April to 3 May 2019, at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, reflecting the draft resolution as contained in the document E/CONF.105/L.3. However, existing arrangements for the thirty-first United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names Session and the twelfth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names will continue to be effective until the Council has passed E/CONF.105/L.3.

II. Reports of the working groups.

2. **The Group of Experts considered agenda item 3 (reports of the working groups) at its 1st and 2nd meetings on 7 August 2017(see also paragraph 43).**

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

3. In working paper No. 1, the Working Group reported on its activities for 2016 and 2017, which included supporting the preparation of documents submitted to the seventh Session of the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management, contributing articles to the Group of Experts Bulletins about national efforts for databases and gazetteers and providing consultancy and technical advice concerning the content and structure for data files and gazetteers. General progress against the work plan and future activities of the Working Group were also noted.

4. The expert from the USA/Canada Division made a comment.

B. Report of the Working Group on Romanization Systems

5. Working paper No. 2 highlighted the recent activities of the working group. A resolution on the romanization of Arabic (Unified Arabic Transliteration System (Beirut 2007 system)) was adopted at the Eleventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. It was announced that Ms. Catherine

Cheetham (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) had accepted to become co-convenor of the working group.

6. The Chair and experts from the Arabic Division and the Asia South-East Division made comments and raised questions. The coordinator of the Task Team for Africa made a statement.

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

7. Working paper No. 3 catalogued the six international and one national toponymic training courses held since 2012. A training course is planned to be held in the Philippines in 2018. Three web courses are in various stages of development. A toponymy training manual will be available for download from the Group of Experts website starting the week of 14 August 2017. It was announced that Peder Gammeltoft (Denmark) has been selected to be the new Convenor of the Working Group on training courses in toponymy.

D. Report of the Working Group on Exonyms

8. The results of Working Group's workshop in Prague – the 19th meeting, were described in working paper No. 4. During the Prague workshop, the debate on the use of exonym/endonym divide continued, however, on the last day resulted in an agreement on a small set of globally common characteristics and criteria which were to be submitted to the eleventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. Proceedings of the 19th meeting will appear as Volume 7 of the book series Name & Place. It was announced that Kohei Watanabe (Japan) will be the new convenor of this Working Group.

E. Report of the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation

9. Working paper No. 5 covers activities of the Working Group since the twenty-ninth session. The Working Group held a workshop on implementing resolutions at the twenty-ninth Session in Bangkok and a Working Group meeting was held in Innsbruck, Austria in April 2017. During both the workshop and the meeting, the discussions centered on the adoption of measures to improve the implementation of resolutions and the functioning of the Group of Experts and the Conferences. Updates were provided on the work done on the resolutions database and the session evaluation survey.

F. Report of the Working Group on Publicity and Funding

10. Working paper No. 8 presented the activities of the working group since the twenty-ninth United Nation Group of Experts on Geographical Names session including the work done to achieve its aims of raising awareness on the need for geographical names standardization. The Group of Experts presence on the web and on social media is generally good, although there remains room to expand and improve. The report also highlighted challenges in finding financial support for training and sponsoring the attendance of representatives from developing countries at conferences and sessions. The convenor reported that a new convenor or co-convenor was sought.

11. An expert from the United Kingdom Division made a comment or raised a question.

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

12. Working paper No. 9 noted that at the twenty-ninth Session of the Group of Experts, three countries presented updated versions of toponymic guidelines (Finland, the Republic of Korea and South Africa). All Toponymic Guidelines are available online, on the Group of Experts website. To promote the dissemination of Group of Experts Toponymic Guidelines, Wikipedia entries have been created and linked to relevant topics.

H. Report of the Task Team for Africa

13. Working paper No.13 provided the background to the important work of the Task Team for Africa. The report discussed the challenges to the establishment of national bodies of geographical names standardization and the ways the team has been successful in achieving its goals. A meeting is being planned for November 2017 in Algiers, Algeria.

I. Report of the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage

14. Working paper No. 14 summarized the working group's activities since 2016. The most important work items are geographical names used by minorities, legislation and policies regarding geographical names as cultural heritage, the promotion of fieldwork and the registration of names. The Working Group intends to make guidelines available on its website, as well as present examples of good naming practices. The report significantly notes that the Statute of the Group of Experts was changed to include reference to geographical names as cultural heritage. The working group plans to organize workshops and joint meetings with other working groups in order to strengthen its work.

J. Report of the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology

15. No papers were presented under this working group. It was announced that Mr Trent Palmer (United States of America) had accepted to become the new Convenor of the Working Group.

K. Report of the Working Group on Pronunciation

16. No papers were presented under this working group. An expert from the Dutch- and German-Speaking Division announced on behalf of the convenor that the convenor was not able to continue coordinating the activities of the working group.

17. It was decided that the working group be abolished and its activities divided between the working group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers and the working group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage.

III. Reports of the liaison officers.

18. **The Group of Experts considered agenda item 4 (reports of the liaison officers) at its 2nd meeting on 7 August 2017 (see also paragraph 44).**

A. International Council of Onomastic Sciences (ICOS)

19. The liaison officer for ICOS outlined in working paper No. 6 the activities of ICOS which included its newsletter and the journal *Onoma*, the official publication (yearbook) of the Council. The Council has published a short list of key onomastic terms available on its website in English, French and German. In addition, ICOS has been cooperating with members of the Group of Experts

working group on Toponymic Terminology. The 26th Congress will be held in Debrecen, Hungary 27 August – 1 September 2017.

B. Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN)

20. The liaison officer for ICANN presented working paper No. 7 relating its work on the assignment of top-level domains (TLDs) to geographical names, languages and scripts. The Fast Track Process enables countries and territories that use languages based on scripts other than Latin to offer domain names to users in non-Latin characters. As of 1 July 2017, a total of 59 labels from 39 countries and territories have been successfully evaluated for delegation through the Fast Track Process. The next ICANN international public meeting (ICANN 60) will be in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates in the autumn of 2017.

C. Joint International Cartographic Association (ICA)/International Geographical Union (IGU) Commission on Toponymy

21. Working paper No. 10 presented information on recent activities of the Commission. Since the twenty-ninth UNGEGN Session, the Commission organized and co-organized two symposia and two conferences. The Commission's flagship project is establishing a geographical names consortium of several universities, in which toponymic courses will be offered, based on a common curriculum approved by the Commission and with lecturers (among others) from the Commission.

D. Working Group on Geographical Names of the Interstate Council for Geodesy, Cartography, Cadastre and Earth Remote Sensing of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)

22. Working paper No. 11 provided information on the recent activities of the Working Group. At meetings in Yerevan (2015) and Chisinau (2016), the experts exchanged information and experience related to a range of geographical names issues. The report highlighted the working group's information e-bulletin which contains information on more than 6,300 geographical names of 11 countries which have been legally changed since 1990.

E. Pan American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH)

23. Working paper No. 12 was presented on behalf of the liaison officer with PAIGH. It discussed the various versions of its toponymic training course. No course is currently scheduled for presentation in 2017. The original two-week course was designed to provide an introduction and basis for national standardization of geographic names and a program of applied toponymy. This course has been altered considerably, now shortened to one week. The PAIGH Working Group on Geographical Names is progressing towards making an online course available, but the completion date is yet unknown.

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

24. At its second meeting on 7 August 2017, the Group of Experts considered agenda item 6 (Review of the statute of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names) and the Chair presented document GEGN30/2. No comments were made from the floor.

V. Election of officers

25. The Group of Experts considered agenda item 7 (election of officers) at its third meeting on 18 August 2017.
26. The Group of Experts unanimously agreed to elect the following members to its bureau for the period 2017-2022, subject to the approval of the Council of resolution E/CONF.105/L.3, in which case the bureau will be elected for the period 2017-2019:

Chair:

Mr. William **Watt** (Australia)

Vice-Chairs:

Ms. Naima **Friha** (Tunisia)

Mr. Hasanuddin **Abidin** (Indonesia)

Rapporteurs:

Mr Trent **Palmer** (United States of America)

Mr. Sungjae **Choo** (Republic of Korea)

27. 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.

VI. Planning for the implementation of the recommendations of the Eleventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names and working groups for future requirements

28. The Group of Experts considered agenda items 8 (Planning for the implementation of the recommendations of the Eleventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names) and 9 (working groups for future requirements) at its third meeting on 18 August 2017. It adopted the draft decision entitled "Report of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names on its thirtieth session, and dates for the next United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names meeting on the Standardization of Geographical Names".
29. The Thirtieth Session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, held one day before and one day after the Eleventh United Nations

Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, achieved the following goals:

- (a) The presentation of reports by the nine 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 Tenth Conference;
- (b) The discussion of organizational matters for the next meeting, 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 period;
- (d) The election of the Chair of the Group of Experts and other bureau members to direct the work of the Group until the next meeting pending the Economic and Social Council's approval of E/CONF.105/L.3;
- (e) The planning of the activities of the working groups and other processes to address the resolutions of the Eleventh Conference;
- (f) The presentation of reports by geographical/linguistic divisions and working groups of the Group of Experts that met during the Eleventh Conference in New York;
- (g) The recommendation that the next meeting of the Group of Experts be held 29 April – 3 May 2019 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

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).

- 30. The Group of Experts decided to establish a new Task Team for Oral Languages. It was noted that the three working groups on Romanization, Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers and Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage would be seeking to work together on this project.
- 31. Special note was made of the Group of Experts Geographical Names Database (<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/geonames/>) and experts were encouraged to contribute to the collection of information to the database.

VII. Provisional agenda for the thirty-first session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names

- 32. The Group of experts considered agenda item 10 (Provisional agenda for the thirty-first session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names) at its third meeting on 18 August 2017. The provisional agenda for the thirty-first session (GEGN/30/6) and alternative provisional agenda for the thirty-first session of UNGEGN (GEGN/30/7) were not discussed pending the Economic and Social Council's decision on the proposal contained in document E/CONF.105/L.3, as recommended by the Eleventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

VIII. Adoption of the report

33. At its third meeting on 18 August 2017, the Group of Expert considered agenda item 11 (Other business) and adopted the draft report on the activities of its thirtieth session (GEGN/30/L.1) for submission to the Economic and Social Council, and authorized its Rapporteurs to finalize the report, in consultation with the bureau and secretariat of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.
34. Votes of thanks were expressed.

IX. Organization of the session

A. Opening and duration of the session

35. Pursuant to Economic and Social Council decision 2016/259, the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names held its thirtieth session at United Nations Headquarters on 7 and 18 August 2017. The Group of Experts held 3 meetings.

B. Attendance

36. The session was attended by 278 participants representing the geographic/linguistic divisions of the Group of Experts (see annex). The list of participants is contained in document GEGN/30/4.

C. Officers of the session

37. The Officers of the session were as follows:

Chair:

William **Watt** (Australia)

Vice-Chairs:

Ferjan **Ormeling** (Netherlands)

Naima **Friha** (Tunisia)

Rapporteurs:

Peder **Gammeltoft** (Denmark)

Trent **Palmer** (United States)

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

Task Team for Africa

Coordinator:

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

Conveners:

Élisabeth **Calvarin**

Leo **Dillon**

Working Group on Publicity and Funding

Convener:

Peder **Gammeltoft**

Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation

Convener:

Sungjae **Choo**

Working Group on Exonyms

Convener:

Peter **Jordan**

Working Group on Pronunciation

Convener:

Tjeerd **Tichelaar**

Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage

Convener:

Annette **Torensjö**

Toponymic guidelines for map and other editors

Coordinator:

Gerhard **Rampl**

United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names secretariat

Stefan **Schweinfest**, Director of the Statistics Division, Department of
Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat

Cecille **Blake**, Statistics Division

Vilma **Frani**, Statistics Division

D. Opening statements

38. The Chair, William Watt (Australia), opened the thirtieth session of the Group of Experts at its 1st meeting, on 7 August 2017.
39. In his opening remarks, the Chair summarized the main tasks ahead, including preparations for the Eleventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

40. Stefan Schweinfest, Director of the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, made an opening statement summarizing the recent accomplishments and highlighted the work of the Group of Experts.

E. Adoption of the agenda

41. Also at its 1st meeting, on 7 August 2017, the Group of Experts adopted its provisional agenda (GEGN/30/1), as follows:
 1. Opening of the session.
 2. Adoption of the agenda.
 3. Reports of the working groups.
 4. Reports of the liaison officers.
5. Organizational matters concerning the Eleventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.
6. Review of the statute of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.
7. Election of officers.
8. Planning for the implementation of the recommendations of the Eleventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.
9. Working groups for future requirements.
10. Provisional agenda for the thirty-first session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.
 11. Other business.
42. At the same meeting, the Group of Experts approved its organization of work (GEGN/30/5/Rev.1).
43. At its 1st and 2nd meetings, on 7 August, the Group of Experts considered agenda item 3 and heard reports from the Convener of the Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers; the Convener of the Working Group on Romanization Systems; the Convener of the Working Group on Training Courses in Toponymy; the Convener of the Working Group on Exonyms; the Convener of the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation; the Convener of the Working Group on Publicity and Funding; the Coordinator for toponymic guidelines for map and other editors for international use; the Coordinator of the Task Team for Africa; and the Convener of the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage.
44. At its 2nd meeting, the Group of Experts also considered agenda item 4 and heard reports by the International Council of Onomastic Sciences; the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers; the Joint International Cartographic Association/International Geographical Union Commission on Toponymy; the Working Group on Geographical Names of the Inter-state Council for Geodesy, Cartography, Cadastre and Earth Remote Sensing of the Commonwealth of Independent States; and the Pan American Institute of Geography and History.
45. Also at its 2nd meeting, the Group of Experts considered agenda item 5 and adopted the draft organization of work for the Conference.

F. Documentation

46. The documents before the Group of Experts at its thirtieth session are available at the website of the United Nations Statistics Division at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/ungegn/ungegnSession30.html>.

Annex I

List of geographic/linguistic divisions

Africa Central Division
Africa East Division
Africa South Division
Africa West Division
Arabic Division
Asia East Division (other than China)
Asia South-East 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
Pacific South-West Division
Portuguese-speaking Division
Romano-Hellenic Division
United Kingdom Division
United States of America/Canada Division
