

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**SIXTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE  
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES  
NEW YORK, 25 August - 3 September 1992**

**OPENING STATEMENT**

by

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Distinguished Delegates and Observers,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to the Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, on behalf of the Under Secretary-General for Economic and Social Development, Mr. Ji Chaozhu who is absent on official mission.

Although the beginning of cartographic sciences may be traced back to ancient times, the United Nations had the foresight to place this issue on the international agenda at an early stage. Thus, it was twenty five years ago, almost to the day, that the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations convened in Geneva the First United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. The present Sixth Conference is another significant event in the field of cartography in general and in the standardization of geographical names in particular. Both are

playing an increasingly important role today, at a time when we are witnessing significant changes in so many parts of the world.

In addition, our age is often referred to as the information age, and we are said to be living in an information society. Planet Earth is surrounded by a dense web of communication channels that have shrunk it and converted it into a "global village", where time and space are no longer barriers to communication. The maximum speed of information transfer has increased more than a hundred million times in the last hundred years; the amount and volume of data that have been stored can no longer be easily assimilated. Communications and information technologies increasingly penetrate all aspects of today's society and influence the economic, social, political and cultural aspects of our lives.

In this context, the new role of cartography is in itself highly symbolic of the communication era in which we live. Although its origins are closely linked to the evolution of military strategy, cartography is today, more than ever before, in the service of development. Specialized geographical maps, now often generated and updated through satellite technology, have become indispensable tools in the exploration and assessment of natural resources, in monitoring changes related to environment, population, climate and many other vital factors of economic and social development.

Current world realities and the requirements posed by sustainable development have placed new challenges before this Conference. We rely upon your collective wisdom and expertise in finding the most effective way of transliterating and standardizing names so as to avoid misunderstandings and facilitate worldwide communication, while still respecting national and cultural specificities.

Distinguished delegates,

We are all aware of the many achievements reached during these last twenty five years, although it is of course necessary to emphasize the growing number of countries which have established National Geographical Names Boards, created national toponymic guidelines and published detailed gazetteers. While deeply rooted in national actions, these activities have greatly facilitated international standardization. It should also be noted that there are numerous examples of successful cooperation between and among neighbouring countries in the standardization of geographical names in border areas as well as in areas beyond a single sovereignty. A number of training courses were conducted at both national and international levels. All this was made possible due to your successful efforts. I would like to thank all the delegations which have prepared national reports for this Conference. These reports, as well as your discussions during this Conference, will provide useful guidance for future United Nations' work in