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**Eighth United Nations Conference on the  
Standardization of Geographical Names**

Berlin, 27 August-5 September 2002

Item 4 of the provisional agenda\*

**Reports by Governments on the situation in their countries  
and on the progress made in the standardization of  
geographical names since the Seventh Conference**

**Country report of Namibia**

**Submitted by Namibia**

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\* E/CONF.94/1.

## **Background**

Namibia does not have an operational place names authority. The responsibility for establishing a place name authority was given to the Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture (MBESC). Before independence, the National Monument Council was responsible for the place names. The structure and resources for this type of task was not developed so the MBESC had no foundation to begin with. At the biennium conference of the United Nations Educational, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO), indications were made to the effect that UNESCO would assist Namibia in starting the place names project through its participatory programme.

## **Goals and National Programmes**

A workshop on place names was held in April 1998. Professor Raper and Möller from the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names facilitated this. Relevant institutions were represented in this workshop. The workshop focused on Geographical Names, rationale for names committee, the nature of geographical names, recording and storage, digital database management, name list, gazettes and other publications, National Place Names Authorities and the United Nations resolutions and standardization.

In addition to this workshop, a consultancy was commissioned to design the structure of the proposed Namibian Geographical Names Commission. This Commission is envisaged to be a statutory body supervised by the MBESCS. It is to advise the Minister on issues related to geographical names. The Commission is envisaged to among other things

- Standardize Namibian geographical names and implement their use, through participatory research development and maintenance of a database;
- Seek consultation with local stakeholders in fulfilment of its obligation and
- Network with similar institutions in the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) and United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) in order to add value to their tasks.

The Commission is to be semi autonomous in that it is expected to have a functional office with its own structure, staff and budgets.

## **Problems and achievements**

At independence, there were no infrastructure and resources that existed for the take-off of the place names committee. There was also no experience to learn from. A few people trained to ensure the take-off of the Commission left the services of the Ministry. The Ministry had therefore to identify new personnel to take over the task. Therefore not much has been achieved with respect to setting up the Commission and commencing the work of standardizing place names. The Directorate of Survey Mapping, the institution responsible for the production of topographic maps has on its own been compiling some place names as they affect their map revision programmes. The visit to the field helps them in identifying some place names and resolving conflicts, mostly of spellings.

## **Conclusions**

Namibia has not been able to establish a functional place names authority. Efforts have been made to establish a Namibian Geographical Names Commission. These efforts have not been very fruitful due mainly to the lack of resources and capacity. Namibia will need the assistance of the relevant United Nations organs like the UNESCO and the UNGEGN to establish a functional Geographical Names authority.