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English only

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

Berlin, 27 August-5 September 2002

Item 14 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**

**Report of South Africa**

**Submitted by South Africa**

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\* E/CONF.94/1.

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## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

The Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, Dr Ben Ngubane, established in terms of the Act of Parliament (Act No. 118 of 1998) the South African Geographical Names Council (SAGNC). The SAGNC is the permanent advisory body that advises the Minister on the transformation and standardisation of geographical names in South Africa. This has enabled the people of South Africa to have a say and not to be decided for in things affecting their daily lives.

Liberation has been achieved, it is now time for the people of South Africa to play their role in changing our country to be what we fought for. For the first time in our history and that of our country, people have been afforded an opportunity to have a say in the naming of their geographical places. We should indeed show that the situation is now different, we have gone past the apartheid era. We should soon change the face of our country and not to be seen as part of Europe in Africa. A move should be taken to change all those blasphemous and insulting names, foreign names that exist in other countries and those that are wrongly spelt. This is the mandate given to our Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology to see to it that this is done. It is then upon all South African to see to it that this is done and achieved, as this will be a major mark that will show change in our country. South Africa has a democratically elected government and should reflect this new change all around it. It should move fast like its neighbouring countries that moved fast to remove anything that reminded them of the colonial and oppressive years.

All South Africans from individuals to groups are free to have their inputs through the forms that are available from the Head, Geographical Names Unit, based at the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, P/Bag X894, Pretoria 0001. In those forms people are free to propose new names as well as changes to the existing ones as long as they state reasons thereof.

Prof. L F Mathenjwa  
Chairperson: South African Geographical Names Council

## OVERVIEW OF THE COUNCIL

This report covers the period from the inception of the Council until the end of its first full financial year. The Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology established the South African Geographical Names Council in terms of the South African Geographical Names Council Act No. 118 of 1998. The Council was inaugurated on 8 December 1999. It consists of 25 members.

Administrative support for the Council is provided by the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST). Initially it fell under the National Language Service of DACST. It has subsequently been transferred to the Heritage Directorate of DACST.

The decisions of the Council are ratified and authorised by the Minister, and persons and institutions that do not abide by the decisions of the Council may be prosecuted.

## MEMBERS OF COUNCIL

(The positions of the members are given as they were at the time of appointment.)

In accordance with section 3(1)(a) of the Act, the following provincial representatives were nominated by the MECs of different provinces:

Gauteng	Ms P Madiba, Chief Director: Sports, Arts and Culture
Western Cape	Dr M Burden, Senior Lecturer, Cultural History, University of Stellenbosch
Northern Cape	Mr C F Fortune, Assistant Director: Heritage Unit of the Department of Sports, Arts and Culture
Eastern Cape	Dr CW Manona, Senior Researcher, Institute for Social and Economic Research, Rhodes University
KwaZulu-Natal	Mr M Mbatha, Senior Researcher and Head: IsiZulu Dictionary Unit, University of Zululand
Mpumalanga	Mr S M Molala, Headmaster and Researcher: Chris Hani Secondary School
North West	Mr M Magwetyana, Mayor of Mafikeng
Free State	Mr T Mokeyane, Deputy Director: Library and Information. Department of Sport, Culture, Science and Technology
Northern Province	Ms A Mawela, Deputy Director: Language Services of the Department of Sport, Art and Culture

In terms of section 3(1)(b) of the Act, the bodies stipulated in the Act nominated the following individuals:

Post Office	Mr LM Jacobs, Senior Manager: Post Offices
Chief Directorate: Surveys and Mapping	Mr D Clarke, Chief Director: Surveys and Mapping
Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB)	Mr M B Kumalo, Chairperson: Sub-committee for Lexicography, Terminology and Place Names (now Chairperson) of PANSALB

The Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology approved that the following individuals recommended by the Selection Panel be appointed to serve on the South African Geographical Names Council:

Ms S Dichabe	Campus Manager Technikon Free State
Prof NCP Golele	Professor of Xitsonga University of the North
Mr M Jadezweni	Lecturer in African Languages at Stellenbosch University
Prof E R Jenkins	Emeritus Professor of English at Vista University
Mr P J Lehohla	Chief Director for Demography in Statistics SA
Prof T H Links	Registrar of Technikon SA
Mr P M Lubisi	Lecturer in African Languages at University of Zululand
Dr Veena Lutchman	Lecturer in Hindi at University of Durban-Westville
Prof. L F Mathenjwa	Senior Lecturer in isiZulu at University of Zululand
Dr L A Möller	Chief Researcher at HSRC
Ms B Mrawu	Project Co-ordinator, Land Claims Commission
Dr P E Raper	Chairman of United Nations Group of Experts of Geographical Names
Prof P J N Zungu	Senior Lecturer and Head of isiZulu at University of Durban Westville

## OFFICE BEARERS

Chairperson

Dr L F Mathenjwa  
PO Box 24112  
KWADLANGEZWA  
3886

Deputy Chairperson

Ms S Dichabe  
15 Liefste Maryn Crescent  
Pellisier  
BLOEMFONTEIN  
9301

## STAFF

Mr M T Kubheka: Assistant Director (Head)

who does the following:

Facilitates activities of the SAGNC.

Liaises with the stakeholders.

Manages, plans and evaluates the human and financial resources of the Geographical Names Unit.

Reports to the Director of Heritage.

Liaises with the SAGNC.

Mrs B Havemann: Principal Cultural Officer (PCO)

who does the following

Co-ordinates research and publications.

Reports to the assistant director (head).

Ms T Zungu: Cultural Officer (CO)

who does the following:

Manages the entire process of the database.

Reports to the assistant director (head).

Ms L Hadebe: Cultural Officer (CO)

who does the following:

Provides administrative support to the SAGNC.

Handles submissions.

Reports to the assistant director (head).

## MEETINGS OF COUNCIL

The Council has met five times:

8 December 1999	Oranje Nassau Building, Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, Pretoria
3 & 4 February 2000	Caesar's Convention Centre, Kempton Park
6, 7 & 8 April 2000	Tropicana Hotel, Durban
7 July 2000	Oranje Nassau Building, Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, Pretoria
19 January 2001	Oranje Nassau Building, Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, Pretoria

## TRAINING SESSION

A training and capacity-building session for Council members was held on 6 April 2000.

## PRINCIPLES, POLICIES AND OBJECTIVES OF THE COUNCIL

The Council replaced the National Place Names Committee, which had advised the government on the approval of place names since 1940.

Among the significant differences between the Council and its predecessor are that the Council has a much wider mandate, covering all forms of geographical features; that it can be proactive in identifying entities for naming or renaming; and that its decisions, when ratified by the Minister, are enforceable by law.

Taking cognisance of United Nations resolutions and international practices, the Council has established a set of principles and policies.

## **Area of jurisdiction**

The Council has jurisdiction over all names of geographical features and entities falling within the territories over which the South African government has sovereignty or jurisdiction acquired by treaty.

## **Policies**

Standardisation (i.e. deciding on the name to be applied to each feature, and on the written form of that name) should be based on:

- the current orthographic rules of the languages from which the names are derived, always, however, taking into account current local usage;
- the wishes and/or interest of the local population, provided these are not in conflict with the guiding principles;
- the historical use of the name;
- matters of redress, where names need to be changed on the basis of historical consideration;
- United Nations resolutions on the standardisation of geographical names;
- any other relevant factors which may be identified.

## **Principles**

- (i) Each individual feature of entity should have only one official name.
- (ii) The following types of geographical names should generally be avoided:
  - approved names of places elsewhere in South Africa;
  - names of places in other countries, and names of countries;
  - names of which the spelling or pronunciation is so close to that of an existing names that confusion might result;
  - names that are blasphemous, indecent, offensive, vulgar, unaesthetic or embarrassing;
  - names that are discriminatory or derogatory as regards race, colour, creed, gender, political affiliation or other social factors;
  - names that are clumsily compounded;
  - names consisting of personal names without a generic element;
  - names that may be regarded as an advertisement for a particular product, service or firm;
  - names of living persons.

## **Human rights and the South African Constitution**

Determining a name, or names, for a place requires balancing historical and linguistic considerations, communicative convenience, the spirit of community and the spirit of the nation.

## Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives of the Council are to:

- (i) ensure the standardisation of geographical names;
- (ii) facilitate the establishment of provincial geographical names committees;
- (iii) facilitate the transformation process for geographical names;
- (iv) promote the use of standardised South African geographical names at international level;
- (v) ensure the implementation of standardised geographical names in South Africa; and
- (vi) promote awareness of the economic and social benefits of the standardisation of geographical names.

## Corporate goals

Taking into account the history of geographical naming in South Africa, the Council will:

- (i) redress the imbalances caused by the lack of representivity in the previous naming system;
- (ii) correct the spelling of wrongly spelt geographical names;
- (iii) transform the naming process in South Africa;
- (iv) standardise all geographical names through the pro-active engagement of all stakeholders and role players.

In pursuit of these goals, the Council will take the following steps:

- (i) Redress

Redress imbalances caused by lack of representivity.

Directly involve all affected communities in the naming of national geographical features.

Review geographical names in previously marginalised languages.

- (ii) Correct

Correct the hitherto wrongly spelt names of geographical features.

Correct the procedures hitherto followed in the national naming system.

Create mechanisms for replacing historically imposed national geographical names.

- 3(iii) Transform

Recognise the role of oral history in the naming process.

Promote archival and heritage research as an integral part of the naming process.

Inculcate a positive national culture of participation in decision making related to naming.

Create an awareness of government-facilitated services in the naming process, through the spirit of *Batho Pele* (People First).

Promote accessibility of the standardising of names to all stakeholders and role players.

Simplify, popularise and communicate procedures for standardising names, using print and electronic media.

- (iv) Standardise

Ensure standardisation of all national geographical names.

Set up provincial geographical names committees (PGNCs) according to the provisions of the South African Geographical Names Council Act and the Regulations Relating to the Standardisation of Geographical Names.

## **SUB-COMMITTEES**

Council appointed the following sub-committees. In addition to the initial appointments, other members have on occasion been co-opted.

### **Review Sub-committee**

To standardise spelling; to review multiple names, existing names not officially recognised, and all other related issues as the Council may decide.

Members:

Mr Kumalo (Convener)

Ms Dichabe

Mr Jacobs

Mr Jadezweni

Ms Mrawu

Prof Zungu

### **Database Sub-committee**

To design a database model; to collect data; to determine a method of updating it; to link up with other databases; and to determine user needs.

Members:

Dr Möller (Convener)

Mr Clarke

Mr Lehohla

Mr Makeyane

Ms Mawela

Dr Raper

### **Training and Capacity-building Sub-committee**

To create a stakeholder base; to have workshops for students; to design a training manual; and to build capacity at provincial and local levels.

Members:

Dr Raper (Convener)

Dr Burden

Mr Fortune

Dr Lutchman

Dr Möller

Prof Zungu



### **Media Liaison and Publications Sub-committee**

To communicate decisions and relevant information; to be responsible for gazetteer production, electronic distribution and the Council's annual report.

Members:

Prof Jenkins (Convener)

Prof Golela

Mr Lubisi

Mr Mokeyane

Dr Möller

### **Awareness Campaign Sub-committee**

To work on a campaign strategy; to attend to the declaration of a National Geographical Names Day; to identify NGO and CBO networks and other target groups.

Members:

Ms P Madiba (Convener)

Mr Magwetyana

Mr Mbatha

Dr Manona

Ms Mawela

Mr Molala

### **Guidelines and Procedures Sub-committee**

To draw up a code of conduct; to propose operations of the Council with regard to provincial and local structures; and to review regulations and policy on the standardisation of geographical names.

Members:

Mr Lubisi (Convener)

Adv. Beukes (Legal Officer)

Ms Dichabe

Mr Kumalo

Dr Lutchman

Dr Möller

Dr Raper

At the meeting on 7 April it was decided to merge the Media Liaison and Publications Sub-committee and the Awareness Campaign Sub-committee as the work of the two groups overlapped. At the beginning of 2001 a new sub-committee was formed for this purpose with Mr Molala as convener.

## **POLICY DOCUMENTS**

The following four policy documents have been approved by Council.

### **(i) Code of Conduct**

This governs attendance of and procedures during meetings, and professional and proper conduct of members.

**(ii) Business Plan**

This is the basic document on how the Council intends to operate. It covers such matters as terms of reference, functions, areas of jurisdiction, policies and principles, strategic plan and budget.

**(iii) Guidelines for the Establishment of Provincial Structures**

In terms of the Act, one of the objects of the Council is to facilitate the establishment of Provincial Geographical Names Committees. These committees should be established by the Provincial department responsible for Arts and Culture, after consultation with the Council. The Council has drawn up a set of guidelines for these committees.

The guidelines give the recommended structure and composition of the provincial committees, their recommended duties and functions, and proposals for the creation of provincial geographical names units which would provide support staff for the committees.

**(iv) Guidelines for the Review of Existing Names**

These guidelines will govern the work of the Council in reviewing previously approved names and existing names which have not previously been approved by the Council.

**GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL**

At each meeting the Council scrutinises lists of names submitted for approval by the post office, local authorities, property developers and other interested parties.

Attention is given mainly to the manner of writing a name according to the approved orthography of the source language, but also taken into account are such factors as the history of the naming of the feature, duplication of names, ambiguity, clumsiness and excessive length.

The Council ensures that it obtains and records information about the entity being named, including its geographical co-ordinates, the origin and meaning of the name, and the identity of the informant.

Some names are referred back for further research or suggested modification.

Once the Council has approved the names they are submitted to the Minister for final approval, and they are then published in the Government Gazette.

Lists of approved names that have been gazetted are given in the Appendix to this Report.

**DATABASE**

The Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology is required to establish and implement a national database of approved geographical names in digital format to fulfil its brief to the Council.

Four existing databases were considered for use in order to compile a national database:

- (i) The Place Names database of the Human Sciences Research Council (about 90 000 records of names);
- (ii) The National Place Names Committee database (about 5000 records);
- (iii) The Chief Directorate of Surveys and Mapping database (91 600 names);
- (iv) The United States Board on Geographic Names Gazetteer of South Africa (about 120 000 names).

The existing databases of the Human Sciences Research Council have been acquired by the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology.

It was recommended in the Report of the Database Sub-committee that these databases be used as archival references for the establishment of a new national database of approved geographical names.

Guidelines, procedures and minimum requirements for the national database have been drawn up, which meet the needs of the Council and which comply with international data standards and other specifications regarding the minimum required fields of information as determined by the resolutions of the United Nations Conferences on the Standardisation of Geographical Names. Agreement has been reached on the column headings and information fields which are required for a single set of digital geographical names information in MS Access format.

In order to establish the national database of approved geographical names for the Council, the various databases will have to be checked to enable research and cross-referencing. This will entail on-going quality assessment and evaluation, since the information for each record was not in all cases complete, consistent or up to date. Editing, research, follow-up fieldwork and verification processes will need to be undertaken by the research and support staff, probably in consultation with other researchers and geographical names experts.

On 6 December 2000 three staff members of the secretariat underwent basic training on how to establish and maintain a database for the Council.

#### **REVIEW OF EXISTING NAMES**

The Council has commenced the review of names that have not previously been submitted for approval. Names that appear to have racist connotations have been referred to relevant authorities and communities for comment and suggested substitutes.

The draft fourth edition of the *Toponymic Guidelines for South Africa*, compiled by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, was submitted by UNGEGN to the Council in May 2000. These guidelines cover the orthographies of the languages of South Africa and their application to geographical names. The Council has made amendments to the draft, and it has been submitted to the National Language Bodies that have been established by the Pan-South African Language Board, with the request that the orthographic rules should be brought into line with the most recent standardised orthographies.

#### **PROVINCIAL GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES COMMITTEES**

As the national body, the South African Geographical Names Council has been assigned amongst its duties the responsibility to facilitate the establishment of Provincial Geographical Names Committees (PGNC). According to Act No. 118 of 1998 subsection 9(1) the Council must set guidelines for the operation of Provincial Geographical Names Committees and local authorities in their respective areas of jurisdiction.

At the meeting of the Minister and MECs Council (MINMEC) on 21 November 2000, the MECs agreed that the provincial structures should be set up as a matter of urgency. On 16 January 2001 letters in this regard were sent to all MECs requesting them to facilitate the process. This process is expected to be completed by June 2001.

## **MEDIA LIAISON, PUBLICATIONS AND PUBLIC AWARENESS**

The vision of the Council is:

- to empower communities to play a meaningful role in the naming of places in their environment;
- to create a people-driven approach to the naming of places, with the view to ensuring redress of discrepancies created by the colonial and apartheid past;
- to stimulate grassroots consciousness about place naming so as to ensure that people have ownership of place names;
- to disseminate information about naming of geographical features and arouse consciousness through participation by all.

The Council is preparing strategies for implementing this vision which will involve the proposed Provincial Geographical Names Committees.

The Council has liaised with the Communications Directorate of DACST on developing a strategy for the publication of the products of the Council and the dissemination of information through person-to-person activities and the print and electronic media.

## **INQUIRIES**

The Council receives inquiries and requests on a variety of subjects from government bodies, interest groups and individuals. This interest is welcomed, and the Council attends to inquiries as best it can. However, they often fall outside the terms of reference of the Council, or are formulated in such a way that they cannot be processed. It is hoped that, once the campaign to educate the public gets under way, a more constructive dialogue between the Council and interested parties will develop.

## **INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES**

### **Representation at international level**

The chairperson and/or his/her deputy will be the official representatives of the Council at national or international level, and will report back to the Council.

### **International activities**

#### New York

In January 2000 the chairperson of the Council and a representative from the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology attended a two weeks conference of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) in New York.

This was indeed an eye-opener, especially to the new Council members, as it was the first time that they were exposed to the international standards regarding geographical names. It was at this meeting that they learnt about the responsibilities of geographical place names committees worldwide. UNGEGN as a world body sets guidelines and procedures that should be followed by almost all place names bodies in the world. It was emphasized that foreign names should not be given preference at the expense of indigenous names. This was identified as an international problem because of political and historical reasons. It was, however, interesting to note that most countries have made serious attempts to correct this situation. This was seen as a serious challenge facing our country as it is full of foreign geographical names that make one not easily differentiate whether he/she is in Europe or Africa.

It was also at this meeting that South Africa was requested to convene a meeting of the Africa South Division and try to revive UNGEGN practices in those countries. The Africa South Division is made up of the following countries: Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Angola, Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and South Africa. This mandate has not yet been met as we are still busy cleaning our own backyard.

#### Korea

On the 14-18 August 2000 the chairperson attended the 29th International Geographical Congress in Seoul, Korea. The theme of the congress was "Living With Diversity". The sub-theme in which the UNGEGN members were involved was titled Geography and Place Names. The chairperson's paper was entitled: *Eradicating Indigenous People's History and Heritage Through Naming: A South African Experience*.

This paper highlights geographical names that exist in other countries in the world which were enforced in our country at the expense of indigenous ones. Indigenous names had meaning in terms of history and heritage for the indigenous people of South Africa; therefore removing them means removing people's culture and heritage.

### **ASSESSMENT OF THE YEAR'S ACTIVITIES**

The two major tasks of the Council in its first year of existence were to prepare the groundwork for its future operation, and to continue without interruption the day-to-day work of its predecessor, the National Place Names Committee.

#### **(i) Groundwork**

The administrative procedures for the Council are in place. The principles and policies of the Council have been established, and the criteria have been determined for the approval of new names and the review of existing names. A start has been made with the review of existing names that have not yet been approved. Guidelines for establishing Provincial Committees have been drawn up, and the procedure for establishing these Committees is under way. A broad strategy for publicity and the education of the public has been planned.

The databases from which the electronic database will be constructed and the form it will take have been decided upon. The databases have been acquired and training has been given to members of the Geographical Names Unit of DACST.

Council members who were hitherto unfamiliar with the technical issues involved in standardising geographical names have had a fruitful year reaching consensus and coming to grips with what the work of the Council and its contribution to the transformation of South Africa entail.

#### **(ii) Day-to-day activities**

A backlog of names awaiting approval had built up during the interim while the new Council was being established. The Council caught up and has approved a considerable number of new names. Since the majority of them were for new Post Office facilities, the Council has in this way supported the Post Office in its expansion campaign.