

25 August 2002

Original: English

Eighth United Nations Conference on the
Standardization of Geographical Names
Berlin, 27 August-5 September 2002
Item 5 of the provisional agenda*

REPORTS BY DIVISIONS OF THE GROUP OF EXPERTS ON
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES ON THE SITUATION IN THEIR DIVISIONS AND
ON THE PROGRESS MADE IN THE STANDARDIZATION OF
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES SINCE THE SEVENTH CONFERENCE

Report of the Dutch-and German-speaking Division (DGSD)

(Submitted by Netherlands)**

*E/CONF.94/1

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Geographical Names

Summary

Activities in the Dutch- and German-speaking Division (DGSD) since the Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in New York in 1998 were very much geared to the preparation of the Eighth Conference, and the new elements linked to it, such as the toponymy course and the exhibitions. For the toponymy course a team of lecturers was composed chiefly from DGSD countries, assisted by Canada and Estonia. For the topical exhibition a team of thematic coordinators was formed by experts from Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria and Estonia, which was assisted by material sent in by experts from many countries. Apart from the topical exhibition, commercial exhibition and an exhibition of material sent in by individual countries were organised.

1. Membership and participation

In the period 1997-2002 experts from the following countries were members of the Dutch- and German-speaking Division (DGSD):

Austria
Belgium
Germany
Italy
The Netherlands
South Africa
Suriname
Switzerland

2. Chairmanship

According to the statutes, the DGSD chair passed from Germany to the Netherlands in the year 1999. Dr Ferjan Ormeling was asked to act accordingly.

3. Meetings

The Division held 7 meetings since the Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in New York in 1998:

9. January 12, 19 and 20, 1998, in New York
10. October 20, 1998, Bonn
11. May 17, 1999, Maastricht
12. January 21, 2000, New York
13. March 29, 2000, Frankfurt am Main
14. October 11, 2000, Berlin
15. March 10, 2002, Dresden

Attendance varied between 5 and 11 experts. The agenda referred to UN resolutions, toponymical guidelines, training courses, lists of exonyms, a geographical names data base for Europe, the Names symposia and increasingly, as the 8th conference drew nearer, to the exhibition and training course connected to it.

4. Geographical Names symposia

In Frankfurt, May 2000 and in Berchtesgaden, October 2002, geographical names symposia were organised by DGSD. The Second International Symposium on Geographical Names "GeoNames 2000" held in Frankfurt, March 2000, drew 75 participants from 23 countries, and allowed for the lengthy scientific discussions that cannot take place during the UN Conferences. The International Workshop on "Geonames 2001" was much more restricted in scope, as it only focused on exonyms. It drew 22 participants from 10 countries. Both meetings were meant to prepare for issues that would be dealt with at the Eighth Conference, and speed up the decision-making process there.

5. Participation in UNGEGN sessions and as UNGEGN officers

DGSD experts attended the UNGEGN session held in 2000 in New York in considerable numbers and participated in various working groups. At the 7th UNCSGN Dr Raper was re-elected as chairman of UNGEGN for a 5-year period. The representative of Germany, Dr Sievers, was elected as liaison officer to the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR). The representative of The Netherlands, Dr Ormeling, was re-assigned the chairmanship of the UNGEGN Working Group on Training Courses in Toponymy.

6. Organisation of the 8th United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

Germany made a successful bid at the 2000 UNGEGN meeting, to host the 2002 8th United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. It did so in conjunction with a proposal to streamline the conference, and add a number of new elements, such as training courses (item 8) and exhibitions (country exhibition, commercial exhibition and topical exhibition (item 7)), so that a fuller use of the conference time could be made. In order to prepare for the conference issues, Germany also organised two Geographical Names Symposia (see item 4).

7. Topical exhibition for the 8th conference

With the help of Estonia, a team from DGSD (representatives from Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland) collectively devised a structure for topical exhibitions, consisting of panels addressing toponymical issues, and thus making the subject matter more accessible to the general public. The 6 main topic groupings were: History and change of geographical names, multilingual areas, romanization systems, exonyms, pronunciation and curiosities. The panels designed for this exhibition have been formatted in such a way that the material could easily be exhibited elsewhere, thus assisting in the further promotion of the work of UNGEGN

8. DGSD-UNGEGN Training Course on Toponymy

From August 12 – September 6 a Training Course on Toponymy was organised by Germany and the Netherlands, for which 24 young participants, working on geographical names standardization in developing countries, were invited. The course was sponsored by the United Nations Statistical Office and by the Ministry of the Interior of Germany and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. The course was jointly held at the International Institute of Geoinformation Sciences and Earth Observation (ITC) in Enschede and the Bundesamt für Kartographie und Geodäsie in Frankfurt. The course was a mixture of theoretical lectures, practical exercises, fieldwork and hands-on experience in processing the names data collected in the field later on in information systems from which gazetteers were produced and maps were lettered automatically. An innovative aspect was allowing the course participants to attend the eight conference as observers, so that they could get first hand experience of the organisational procedures and the political considerations that influence the decision-making process at UNGEGN.