

Ninth Session of the
United Nations Group of Experts on
Geographical Names

New York, 17-27 February 1981
Agenda item 7

Review of Recommendations Concerning Aims and Functions

PROPOSAL TO REVIEW UNGEGN AIMS AND FUNCTIONS

Submitted by the United States of America

At the Eighth Session of the UNGEGN, the United States submitted a paper (Working Paper No. 29) that suggested the program of the UNGEGN could be made more effective and that an *ad hoc* committee be established to look into the matter during the session and make relevant recommendations. The press of business already on the agenda prevented any detailed examination of the proposal, but it was agreed that nations could present their views at the Ninth Session. This paper addresses the issue again by requesting the Group of Experts to form a special committee to act during the present session, to study the points of view expressed by members, and to make recommendations as felt necessary.

What are the areas that the United States believes require review and possible change? Some of the areas are matters of organizational policy, and some are matters of practical concern. In regard to policy, the United States believes that, first, it is the duty of all organizations periodically to review their philosophy, their goals, and their methods of work. Such a regular review should be an explicit part of UNGEGN policy.

Another policy matter might be addressed too. The professionalism of the experts, which is a well established fact, along with the spirit of friendly cooperation that has characterized UNGEGN proceedings, suggest that progress by consensus is the best procedure for dealing with questions that can have far-reaching impact, and is the best way to assure the most satisfactory results in the long run. This policy should be firmly supported.

On the practical side, it is recognized that organizational frustration is generated when unrealistic or overly complex tasks are undertaken. Working objectives should be ambitious in aim, but they must be based first and foremost on the essentiality of the requirements. In this connection, one observing the work of the UNGEGN might well see that over the years some programs have a built-in frustration factor. One of the reasons for frustration might well be that these programs brought few if any benefits to the majority of the experts.

Further on the practical side, there is the question of limited resources. Every one of the experts is responsible for other duties in their respective nations, and if the situation in the United States is any example, time for work not directly related to one's day-to-day work is hard to find. This factor all the more dictates that programs be well conceived and brought to fruitful conclusion as expeditiously as possible. Here, the idea of "limited objectives" might well be brought in: this means to adopt realistic programs that can be attacked by the resources at hand and with expectation they will be solved by a stated date.

For these reasons, and to help guarantee that the Group of Experts fulfills the important tasks before it, the United States asks that the Ninth Session of the UNGEGN create a body of those interested in the question to meet during the session and to make recommendations for any changes the participants may feel useful.