

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

New York, 21 - 30 August 2007

Item 5 of the provisional agenda*

**Reports by divisions of the United Nations 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 Eighth Conference**

**A concise overview and synthesis of the information contained
in the Division reports submitted to the Ninth Conference**

Submitted on behalf of UNGEGN **

* E/CONF.98/1.

** Prepared by Botolv Helleland (Norway) on behalf of UNGEGN.

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Historical background

Since the early days of UNGEGN, cooperation concerning common interests and problems among neighbouring regions has been developed. Resolution 24 of the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names recommended that UNGEGN should continue to encourage the geographical/linguistic divisions to be more active in implementing the decisions of the UNCSGN and to report to all states within their divisions as well as back to UNGEGN.

This resolution was followed by resolution 8 at the Fifth UNCSGN which recommended continued organization of the linguistic/geographical divisions and the working groups of UNGEGN to address basic needs in the areas of toponymic training, data files and gazetteers, romanization systems, publicity and funding, and terminology.

In 1982, fifteen divisions were named – over the years, several divisions changed names according to their composition and the region they include. The number of divisions has now reached 23, the most recent, the Portuguese-speaking Division, having been created at the 24th UNGEGN session (20 August 2007).

Division activity and division reports

The work of the divisions is carried out in various ways and with varying intensity, depending on the availability of organizational, economic and human resources.

Out of the total number of divisions, 15 have submitted written reports to this Conference. These documents are listed at the end of this paper. This does not necessarily mean that there is little or no activity in the divisions that have not reported. Where a division has not reported, information on individual countries within the division is sometimes found in country reports. Some division reports cover only a few of the countries of the Division.

Structure and content

The length and structure of division reports vary considerably. This diversity does not, of course, reveal the level of activity within a division, but is rather a decision of the Division or its Chair. However, the variety of approaches raises the question of the possible need for a template for division reports.

The content of the reports is presented in various ways:

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- Some reports are presented partly as a collection of mini-country reports,
 - Some are thematically structured, for instance according to Conference agenda items,
 - Some describe initiatives undertaken by the division as a whole,
 - Some organize their material according to UN resolutions,
 - Some report on activities on a year by year basis.
- ... And most divisions use a combination of these approaches in their reports.

Division meetings

The Division reports reveal that the Divisions, in keeping with resolution VIII/5, have in some cases tried to hold their meetings in conjunction with other names standardization activities – for instance, with UNGEGN Working Groups, with training courses, with other conferences and symposia. It is also notable that representatives from various governmental and municipal departments, as well as from other organizations and other UNGEGN Divisions have participated in some division meetings. Although some divisions have not been able to hold a meeting since the Eighth Conference, others have met 2-5 times over the last five years. Different countries within a division have hosted the various division meetings. Often, divisions have met in conjunction with UNGEGN Sessions, and here at the Conference – which for many is the time at which the Chairmanship of the division is changed. The UNGEGN Chair has attended a number of division meetings and provided a valuable perspective of the work of the division in relation to worldwide efforts of UNGEGN.

Priorities

The structure of the content of reports for the most part reflects the structure of the agendas of the Division meetings. However, clearly the emphasis of the agendas and the reports illustrate the priorities and needs of the divisions (linguistic or geographical) in different parts of the world.

When looking at the contents of the division reports one will see a variety of topics and approaches to the work on the standardization of geographical names. The underlying goal is the creation of a comprehensive geographical names inventory, scrutinized, authorized and readily accessible for all purposes. No division has reached this goal, but most are on their way in this ongoing process.

Main achievements and challenges described in the reports

The Division reports show that there are a variety of activities that have been undertaken in relation to UN resolutions, during the past five years; many of these are, however, based on work in individual countries:

- Meetings of countries within the division providing a forum for exchange of methodology and information, as well as an opportunity to network with others involved in similar activities (*applies to all Division reports*);
- Meetings associated with other cartographic, GIS, cultural or linguist events allow the dissemination of information about standardization to a wider community (*applies also to a number of Divisions*);
- Working to achieve closer cooperation between countries in the Division (e.g. *Asia East Division (other than China); East Central and South-East Europe Division*);
- Training courses, organized in cooperation with UNGEGN (e.g. *Arabic Division, Dutch- and German-speaking Division, Africa South Division, French-speaking Division, Asia South-East and Pacific South-West Division*);
- Creation of online training courses (e.g. *French-speaking Division*);
- Outreach to member countries that have recently joined a division, or to countries that have been inactive (e.g. *Romano-Hellenic Division, Africa South Division*);
- Publications – gazetteers, books on geographical names (e.g. *Norden Division, China Division, Africa South Division*), toponymic guidelines (e.g. *Norden Division, Baltic Division*), legislation (*Africa South Division*);
- Developing pronunciation files (e.g. *Dutch- and German-speaking Division*);
- Promotion of endonyms of the countries of the division – regional map and gazetteer (e.g. *Asia South-East and Pacific South-West Division*);
- Compiling multilingual glossary (e.g. *Romano-Hellenic Division, Asia South-East and Pacific South-West Division*);
- Developing websites for Divisions (e.g. *Latin America Division*);
- Projects on developing scientific Romanization systems (e.g. *Arabic Division; Baltic Division; East Central and South-East Europe Division; Eastern Europe, Northern and Central Asia Division; East Mediterranean Division (other than Arabic)*);
- Exchange of information to address technical issues, such as digital delineation of feature extents (e.g. *United States of America-Canada Division*);
- Preserving geographical names as part of cultural heritage planning (e.g. *China Division; Dutch- and German-speaking Division*);

- Collecting geographical names from the local population (e.g. *Africa South Division, Arabic Division*).

List of documents submitted by UNGEGN Divisions under item 5 of the agenda:

Africa South Division	E/CONF.98/129/Add.1
Arabic Division	E/CONF.98/CRP.37/EN
Asia East Division (other than China)	E/CONF.98/CRP.44
Asia South-East and Pacific South-West Division	E/CONF.98/68
Baltic Division	E/CONF.98/130/Add.1
China Division	E/CONF.98/62/Add.1
Dutch- and German-speaking Division	E/CONF.98/CRP.20
East Central and South-East Europe Division	E/CONF.98/CRP.64
Eastern Europe, Northern and Central Asia Division	E/CONF.98/14/Add.1
East Mediterranean Division (other than Arabic)	E/CONF.98/CRP.82
French-speaking Division	E/CONF.98/114
Latin America Division	E/CONF.98/CRP.83
Norden Division	E/CONF.98/75/Add.1
Romano-Hellenic Division	E/CONF.98/44
United States of America-Canada Division	E/CONF.98/94/Add.1