



**UNITED NATIONS  
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

**UNITED NATIONS  
GROUP OF EXPERTS ON  
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES**

*Newsletter*

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## PREFACE

### Chairman's Report

#### Coordination of toponymic activities in Africa

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) had in 1989, at the 7th United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Africa in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, identified the revitalization and co-ordination of toponymic activities in Africa as an issue of special concern to the ECA. Accordingly, the ECA had elicited the co-operation of the UNGEGN in addressing the issue.

At the 8th United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Africa, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 22-28 February 1993, a session was devoted to the standardization of geographical names. Mr. V. Moskalenko presented reports on the 6th United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names held in New York in August-September 1992, and on the United Nations technical cooperation activities for surveying, mapping, charting and remote sensing.

The Chairman of the UNGEGN helped prepare a background document on the status and problems of the activities on geographical names in Africa, providing proposals for lines of action to the African States. He further briefed the Conference on the UNGEGN and the implementation of United Nations resolutions on the standardization of geographical names, pressing the crucial role of national geographical names authorities. The delegate from Sierra Leone has since expressed his country's needs to establish a names authority or standardizing body and has requested the assistance of the UNGEGN in this respect.

#### Training courses in toponymy

The Government of Kenya has repeated its willingness to host a United Nations toponymic training course if funding can be provided. For the necessary steps to be taken, a training course is envisaged for 1995 or 1996.

#### Implementation of United Nations Resolutions

With a view to furthering the work of the UNGEGN and implementation of UN resolutions on the standardization of geographical names, an article on this subject has been submitted for publication in *Proper Name Studies: an International Handbook on General and European Onomastic Sciences*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin & New York.

### Romanization systems

The political developments in the former USSR have had, and will continue to have, far reaching implications for geographical names. Not only are there many changes in names and/or the status of names, but also transliteration tables for non-Roman scripts are affected. Mindful of relevant United Nations resolutions in this regard, experts in the various countries are urged to submit new or updated tables as soon as possible to the Convenor of the Working Group on Romanization Systems, via the secretariat of the UNGEGN.

### Toponymic guidelines for map and other editors

Another call for cooperation concerns the Toponymic Guidelines for Map and Other Editors. In view of the negotiations currently under way to have the existing Guidelines published, in pursuance of United Nations resolutions, experts are urged to submit press-ready copies of the Guidelines for their respective countries to the Coordinator for Toponymic Guidelines either via the secretariat or directly. The sooner these Guidelines are received, the sooner can they be published.

I take this opportunity to thank those experts who have submitted reports for the current Newsletter, and to offer all members of the UNGEGN best wishes until next time.

Peter E. Raper

I. NEWS FROM HEADQUARTERS

[GEGN/16]  
6 April 1993

ENGLISH ONLY

REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS GROUP OF EXPERTS ON GEOGRAPHICAL  
NAMES ON THE WORK OF ITS SIXTEENTH SESSION

(held at United Nations Headquarters,  
24 August and 4 September 1992)

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1st meeting

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. In pursuance of Economic and Social Council decision 1988/116 of 25 May 1988, the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) held its sixteenth session at United Nations Headquarters on 23 August 1992 and 4 September 1992, one day before and one day after the Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

ATTENDANCE

2. The session was attended by participants of the Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. 1/

3. The Acting Chief of the Physical Infrastructure and Transport Branch, Science, Technology, Environment, Energy and Natural Resources Division of the Department of Economic and Social Development of the United Nations Secretariat, served as Secretary of the Group.

OPENING OF THE SESSION

4. The Chairman, Mr. Peter E. Raper, opened the session.

5. The Secretary welcomed the Group of Experts and noted the importance of their work.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

6. The agenda was adopted as follows:

First meeting

1. Opening of the session.
2. Adoption of the agenda.
3. Reports of the Working Groups.
4. Organization matters concerning the Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.
5. Review of the statute of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.
6. Other business.

## Second meeting

1. Election of officers.
2. Planning for implementation of the recommendations of the Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.
3. Working groups for future requirements.
4. Provisional agenda for the seventeenth session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.
5. Other business.

## REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN

7. The Chairman's report (working paper No. 2) summarized activities undertaken since the fifteenth session of the Group of Experts, which had mainly consisted of training, the preparation of toponymic guidelines and programmes with other organizations. A successful training course had been held in Pretoria, South Africa, in accordance with resolution 21 of the Fifth Conference. The two-week course had been attended by trainees of countries in southern Africa.

8. Contact had been established with the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), which was attempting to stimulate toponymic activities throughout Africa in order to further geographical names standardization. In addition, the Chairman proposed the establishment of a trust fund to make funds available to experts who could not otherwise participate in meetings.

9. A letter had been distributed by the UNGEGN secretariat requesting countries to prepare toponymic guidelines for map and other editors, if they had not already done so. The guidelines were considered by the Chairman to be useful for the standardization of geographical names.

## WORKING GROUP ON DATA FILES AND GAZETTEERS

10. Mr. Lewis (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) reported that a questionnaire had been devised and distributed, which was designed to determine the status and availability of both analogue and digital data files of geographical names in various countries. He spoke of the success of the two-week toponymic training course held in Indonesia in October 1989, noting in particular the keen enthusiasm of the trainees.

11. Mr. Lewis added that the transfer of technology was not the biggest problem in dealing with geographical names. By far the most difficult cartographic problem was the attainment of geographical names information of high quality. The digital environment added a further layer of complexity to the already complex issue, which was further complicated when mapping was conducted in a multilingual environment and still more complicated when the languages were bicultural.



12. Ms. Kerfoot (Canada) stressed the importance of the development of geographical names databases in a microprocessing environment. She reported on ad hoc working-group meetings held at the UNGEGN meeting in Geneva in November 1991, in which three principal tasks had been identified: (a) the collection of information on toponymic databases, for which the questionnaire had been drawn up; (b) the wider dissemination of guidelines on relevant toponymic computer courses and the provision of packages designed to help establish computerized toponymic databases; and (c) the inclusion of an element on automated toponymic databases in training courses.

13. Ms. Mattisson (Sweden), who had collated the results of the questionnaire, reported that 33 responses from 27 countries had been received so far but that this was not yet sufficient for meaningful analysis.

#### WORKING GROUP ON EVALUATION

14. Mr. Randall (United States of America) introduced the report of the Group (working paper No. 3) and drew attention to the attached list of international names authorities and organizations.

15. He stated that annex A of the report dealt with the revision of the aims and functions of UNGEGN, with a view to directing the work more actively towards applied toponymy. He further recommended that a mechanism be established to allow active bilateral assistance, particularly with regard to training and technical exchange. Annex B suggested a re-evaluation of the efficiency and validity of the Conference resolutions of the past 25 years. In summary, the Group needed to be more proactive.

16. Mr. Lewis (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) commented that the primary aim of the Group of Experts should be to standardize names and not necessarily to establish names authorities, which could sometimes have a detrimental effect on names standardization. In the context of the expanding roles of geographic and land information systems, the standardization of names was most important and maps were an excellent vehicle for that purpose.

17. Mr. Ormeling (Netherlands) stated that training should have high priority. He referred to the success of the training course held in Indonesia in 1989. He further indicated that the Government of the Netherlands was still willing to co-sponsor, with the United Nations, a training course for African students in the Netherlands and he expressed his disappointment that the United Nations had been unable to provide funding.

18. The Secretary replied with an explanation of the budgeting structure and procedures of the United Nations. Mr. Kadmon (Israel) pointed out that the training course held in South Africa had been highly successful and that, furthermore, it had been almost totally self-supporting. Ms. Kerfoot (Canada) commented that the course held in Quebec in 1988 had resulted in documents being distributed in French and also translated into English as a training kit, which was available for wide distribution.

#### WORKING GROUP ON ROMANIZATION

19. Mr. Quinting (United States of America) reported that the co-convenor of the Working Group, Mr. Breu (Austria), had retired and had asked him to continue as convenor. The Working Group continued to focus on four systems of romanization - ELOT 743 (Greek), GOST 1983 (Russian), Korean and Thai. Several questions were posed concerning ELOT 743:

(a) Had the new official gazetteer of Greece, using the ELOT system, been published?

(b) Had maps in series other than the 1:250,000 scale been revised?

(c) Was the practical assistance promised by Greece still available?

20. Mr. Pallikaris (Greece) responded to these questions by stating that the gazetteer had been completed in digital form only and the ELOT 743 transliteration system had been automatically applied. Revision of the 1:50,000-scale map series, together with those at scales 1:250,000 and 1:500,000, was under way. He stated that practical assistance to users was available and that past experience had indicated that maps and gazetteers were needed.

21. Mr. Quinting (United States of America) reported that a single romanization system for Korean was being jointly devised by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea and, once finalized, the system would need to be studied and evaluated by the Group of Experts.

22. On the subject of the GOST 1983 transliteration system for Russian, Mr. Quinting asked for information on the progress of work on the new Atlas Mira (World Atlas), as well as on any other publications utilizing the GOST system.

23. Mr. Quinting spoke of the complex situation concerning a romanization system for Thai. There were two proposed versions: one based on transliteration and one based on transcription. Mr. Quinting noted that several changes had been made in 1991 to the system presented in 1987. He also noted the abundance of diacritical marks, which would pose practical problems for users, particularly as the system was designed for automated data exchange. He called for evidence of usage of the system and clarification of which system was being proposed for adoption.

24. In concluding his report, Mr. Quinting called for the opening of a dialogue with the new States of the former Soviet Union to ascertain the status of their native languages and scripts.

#### WORKING GROUP ON TERMINOLOGY

25. Mr. Kadmon (Israel) stated that a finalized glossary had been submitted to the United Nations Secretariat in May 1992. He commented on some of the inadequacies of the previous glossary, such as a bias towards Western languages and a lack of examples for terms included. A first edition of the revision had been produced and distributed in May 1991; by January 1992, further comments had

been received and incorporated into a second edition. Comments received in March and April 1992 might be included in a later version. He anticipated that the users of the terminology bulletin would include map editors, administrators and students. It had been used successfully as training material in the course held in South Africa.

26. Mr. Kadmon (Israel) concluded by saying that, although the glossary was in English, in order to conform to the original aim a multilingual edition was desirable and a resolution to this effect would be put before the Sixth Conference.

#### WORKING GROUP ON TRAINING

27. Mr. Ormeling, Sr. (Netherlands) presented the report of the working group and reiterated the details of the course held in South Africa. He noted the important contribution of the private sector to the course, which underlined the importance of names standardization.

#### REPORT OF THE ARABIC DIVISION

28. Mr. Tazi (Morocco) reported that several successful divisional meetings had taken place and a number of important matters had been highlighted, such as how to convince citizens of the importance of geographical names and the need to preserve Arabic names and how important it was to form national names authorities for the purposes of standardization.

#### PROVISIONAL AGENDA OF THE SIXTH CONFERENCE

29. There was a general discussion and review of the agenda for the Sixth Conference. Mr. Randall (United States of America) requested that the subheading "Antarctic names" be added under item 10 and that additional time be given to item 8. A lengthy discussion ensued regarding the relevance of item 14 - the social and economic values of standardization. It was pointed out that, while experts appreciated those values, the general public did not and their importance should be highly publicized.

#### REVIEW OF THE STATUTE OF THE UNITED NATIONS GROUP OF EXPERTS ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

30. Working paper 4 dealt with proposed alterations to the Statute. 2/ There were no changes to the section on principles; however, working paper No. 4 suggested numerous changes to the sections on aims and functions. Mr. Randall (United States of America) indicated that the general objective had been to encourage a more practical direction for the Group of Experts. There was lengthy discussion regarding the changes and it was agreed that many points should be referred to the drafting committee and that the results should be presented to the Sixth Conference. There was a further lengthy debate on the omission of discussions of a more theoretical nature within the Group of Experts, as well as on the need for uniformity of working practices within the

Divisions. A lively discussion ensued on the subject of publicity and dissemination of information. It was felt that communicating with the media was a matter of individual preference and was not a function of the Group of Experts.

#### OTHER BUSINESS

##### Linguistic divisions

31. The Chairman invited comments on the divisional composition of the Group. He recommended that, in view of the high level of interest in toponymy and the similarity of issues faced in the southern African region, a separate Africa South Division be created. Mr. Kadmon (Israel), referring to his experience at the recent training courses in South Africa, agreed with this recommendation.

32. The Chairman read a recently received facsimile from the Executive Secretary of ECA which put forward the above-mentioned proposal. ECA had also suggested the establishment of an Arabic-speaking division of North Africa and a resolution to this effect could be presented at the Sixth Conference.

33. Mr. Rannut (Estonia) made known the interest of his country and that of Latvia and Lithuania in the creation of a Baltic Division. The question of the former USSR Division was discussed, with general agreement that the Division had been dissolved and that the newly independent nations of the Division should form one or more new divisions if they so desired.

##### Seventh Conference

34. Mr. Tazi (Morocco) proposed that the Seventh Conference, to be held in 1997, include a celebration in honour of all present and previous experts and their work.

##### 2nd meeting

#### ELECTION OF OFFICERS

35. At its 2nd meeting, on 4 September 1992, the Group elected the following officers:

Chairman: Peter E. Raper (South Africa),

Vice-Chairman: Helen Kerfoot (Canada),

Rapporteur: Roger Payne (United States of America).

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESOLUTIONS OF THE SIXTH CONFERENCE

### Resolution 1. Creation of an Africa South Division; a Baltic Division; and an Eastern Europe, Northern and Central Asia Division

36. Mr. Raper (South Africa) announced that in addition to South Africa, Botswana was a member of the Africa South Division and that Zimbabwe had indicated a desire to join.

37. Mr. Rannut (Estonia) noted that in a previous meeting in Tallinn, it had been determined that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania would be members of the Baltic Division.

38. The Eastern Europe, Northern and Central Asia Division would include, among other countries, Azerbaijan and Ukraine. Azerbaijan would also be a member of the Asia South-West Division (other than Arabic). Ukraine would also be a member of the East Central and South-East Europe Division, the Russian Federation would be a member of the Eastern Europe, Northern and Central Asia Division, as well as of the Baltic Division.

39. Mr. Malmirian (Islamic Republic of Iran) announced that Turkmenistan had officially adopted the use of the Farsi language and had indicated at the Fourth Meeting of the Asia South-West (other than Arabic) Division, in Tehran, that Turkmenistan would be joining that Division.

### Resolution 2. Latin American Division

40. Mr. Bejar (Mexico) indicated that since the representative of Cuba was absent he would act as the Division's official representative and that the representatives of Mexico, El Salvador, Venezuela and Brazil would contact the other Division members to determine positive ways to reactivate the work of the Division.

### Resolution 3. Statements of the aims and functions of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names

41. Mr. Randall (United States of America) suggested that at the next UNGEGN meeting each Division report on the positive action taken to implement the revised aims and functions. The Group agreed with the suggestion.

### Resolution 4. Working Group on Evaluation

42. The question of country reports at the Seventh Conference was clarified by the Secretary. Each country would be asked to submit a report and a summary and the Secretariat would then submit to the Conference one document containing the summaries. Mr. Helleland (Norway) suggested that the reports be comprehensive and detailed but that only a short oral summary be made. The Secretary stated that guidelines had been distributed for the Sixth Conference. A lengthy

discussion ensued regarding the content of the reports. It was noted that important items were often included in country reports rather than item papers and as a result were not properly discussed. Conversely, some individual item papers covered less important matters that properly belonged in a country report. The Secretary urged that country reports and item papers be submitted well in advance and that important points be addressed in separate papers. It was further suggested that papers be grouped by category and it was pointed out that grouping by agenda item generally accomplished that goal. Also, some papers were actually written at the Conference, in response to another paper, and it was questioned whether that practice should be eliminated or at least controlled. There was discussion on the matter but no conclusion was reached.

43. There followed a lengthy discussion, initiated by Mr. Helleland (Norway), regarding the need for a document or handbook dealing with methods of fulfilling UNGEGN goals. Mr. Kadmon (Israel) suggested that two publications were needed:

- (a) A compendium of work discussed and resolved by UNGEGN;
- (b) A textbook on toponymy.

44. The discussion continued on the need to classify the resolutions of the past 25 years, especially with regard to relevance. Ms. Kerfoot (Canada) pointed out that her office had produced a classification by subject based on the category or type of resolution and that the file and document would be updated with the resolutions of the Sixth Conference. The Chairman expressed appreciation for that work. Mr. Randall (United States of America) indicated that the Working Group on Evaluation had begun to classify resolutions based on relevance but it was a highly subjective exercise.

45. The Secretary was asked if the United Nations could provide documents on request. He replied that there was a scarcity of storage and other related resources and it was much more efficient for users to make their own copies.

46. The Secretary was asked if the United Nations could take on the maintenance of the list of national geographical names authorities, which had already been started.

#### Resolution 5. Working Group on Publicity and Funding

47. It was decided to consider resolution 5 under the question of working groups (agenda item 3).

#### Resolution 6. Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

48. It was noted and reaffirmed that the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran had offered to host the Seventh Conference in 1997.

