



ISSN 1014-7098  
No. 13  
May 1994

UNITED NATIONS  
DEPARTMENT FOR DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT AND MANAGEMENT  
SERVICES

# UNITED NATIONS GROUP OF EXPERTS ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

## *Newsletter*

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## NOTE

The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

## PREFACE

### Message from the Chairman

This is the first issue of the Newsletter to appear since the seventeenth session of the UNGEGN in June, and once again I thank you all for your valued contributions. During that session the fields of activity in which standardized geographical names are indispensable were identified, and the relevance of the Group's activities and their concurrence with the goals of the United Nations were re-emphasized. You will remember that, since my election as Chairman of the Group in 1991, I have been concerned about the effectiveness, relevance and indispensability of the Group. As a result of decisions taken at that session and the one in 1992, meetings of Working Groups now take place in plenary, to enable all experts to participate with the benefit of simultaneous interpretations, and time allocated to reporting has been limited to the presentation of a summary and discussion of relevant matters.

At the past session in New York I repeatedly asked the experts to review the structure and activities of the Group to consider what we are doing, what we should be doing and how to go about it. Furthermore, the Working Group for Publicity and Funding was charged with continuous review of the structure and activities of the Group to ensure its dynamic and proactive role as an indispensable United Nations body.

Taking stock of ourselves and our activities is an on-going process, and I invite experts to send me any suggestions they may have on improving or enhancing the activities of the Group.

Also, during the past session a number of recommendations were adopted concerning intended activities by experts, working groups and divisions. We look forward to a progress report in the next issue of the Newsletter.

Peter E. Raper  
Chairman, UNGEGN

## I. NEWS FROM HEADQUARTERS

### A. Note from the Secretariat

The report of the seventeenth session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names was submitted to the editors on 19 July 1994. We expect it to be published in August 1994. As usual, the report will be delivered through the United Nations distribution system to all the Member States' Permanent Missions to the United Nations and the United Nations organizations around the globe. The secretariat of the Group of Experts will mail copies of the report to experts.

As you may recall, Mr. Raper, the UNGEGN Chairman, at the last meeting of the session summarized the experts' work and recommendations. We would like to take this opportunity to remind you that one of the recommendations concerning this UNGEGN Newsletter states that *"experts should take advantage of the opportunities presented by the UNGEGN Newsletter to disseminate information and communicate with each other."* Therefore, please do not hesitate to share your activities, views, opinions, findings and problems.

Let us also recall resolution 8 of the sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, the title of which is *Information from countries regarding changes in geographical names*. It says *"...that wherever possible, every six months countries transmit information regarding changes in geographical names to the Secretary of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names in order to enable the Secretariat to disseminate that information through the UNGEGN Newsletter or any other relevant publication, at its convenience."* With this we encourage the experts from the countries where the geographical names have been changed to do so.

Another recommendation of the seventeenth UNGEGN session concerned the translation and publication of the Dictionary of Toponymic Terminology. Mr. Nigel Cassar, Chief of the Terminology Unit, confirmed to us that the translation into Russian can be completed by the Unit in 1995. At the end of 1994 a new word-processing system is expected to be set up in the unit which would generate different non-English fonts.

We also met with Mr. Fouracre, Chief, United Nations Postal Administration, to discuss the possibility to commemorate the 30 years of the UNGEGN by issuing a special stamp. Mr. Fouracre did not welcome the idea, as United Nations stamps do not devote their theme to a specific group of activities but rather to general subjects. We then elaborated the possibility to commemorate the role of cartography in the activities of the United Nations and the place of standardization of geographical names in it. Mr. Fouracre said that he will think this over and will get back to us later for an answer.

We would also like to inform you of actions taken at the 14 July 1994 meeting under agenda item 6(j) "*Economic and Environmental Questions: Cartography*" of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

The representative of China praised the work of the thirteenth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Pacific (Beijing, 9-18 May 1994) and fully endorsed all its resolutions. He expressed the hope that the United Nations would facilitate the implementation of the Conference's recommendations. He also expressed the opinion that this Conference should not be conducted at United Nations Headquarters but should be hosted by Member States on a rotative basis. He also indicated that China strongly supports cartographic activities as an important tool for the implementation of Agenda 21.

The representative of the Republic of Korea supported the Conference's recommendation, and expressed the hope that the issue of the name of the Sea of Japan would be resolved through dialogue. The representative of Japan said his country's position on the Sea of Japan matter was clear and he would not repeat it.

ECOSOC endorsed the United Nations recommendation of the thirteenth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Pacific to convene the fourteenth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Pacific in mid-1997 for five working days, and advised the United Nations Secretary-General to implement other recommendations of the Conference within the limits of existing funds.

Acting on the report of the Committee for Development Planning, the Council recommended to the General Assembly that two new countries, Angola and Eritrea, be added to the list of the least developed countries; that Botswana be graduated from the list immediately; and that Vanuatu be graduated from the list in 1997, conditional upon a review in that year.

Among decisions on regional cooperation, the Council approved the admission of Armenia to the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

In addition, the Council amended the terms of reference of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) to add the Marshall Islands, the Federation States of Micronesia and the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands as members of the Commission.

It should be noted that effective 1 August 1994 the Branch whose Chief is the UNGEGN Secretary received a new name: *Natural Resources and Environment Planning and Management Branch, Division of Economic Policy and Social Development, United Nations Department for Development Support and Management Services*.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

B. Press release on the seventeenth session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names

23 June 1994

The following communiqué was issued today by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names:

In pursuance of Economic and Social Council decision 1988/116, the United Nations Secretary-General invited the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names to convene its seventeenth session at the United Nations Headquarters from 13 to 24 June 1994.

The session was attended by 69 experts and observers from United Nations Member States representing 17 of the 21 geographical linguistic divisions of the Group.

The Group was chaired by an expert from South Africa.

The Department for Development Support and Management Services of the United Nations Secretariat provided a secretariat for the Group, which was established some thirty years ago and which comprises experts in cartography and toponymy from United Nations Member States.

The standardization of geographical names is crucial for effective communication, as well as critical for questions of reaffirming traditional culture as effective expressions of national identity and culture (particularly as regards indigenous peoples), education and training, tourism, trade and commerce, transportation, regional and environmental planning, science and technology, search and rescue operations, or merely normal day-to-day orientation and communication between people.

The experts considered many questions ranging from courses, seminars and practical training in toponymy, to romanization systems and the reduction of the use of exonyms, that is, traditional or conventional names.

One sample illustrating the Group's work is "Toponymic Guidelines for Map and Other Editors." The document was described as among the most useful products of the Group, since those guidelines enable editors of map and other editors worldwide to treat correctly the geographical names of the countries which prepared the Guidelines. Hitherto, the Guidelines were published in the second volumes (Technical Papers) of the reports of United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names and in the World Cartography Bulletin.

Another important achievement of the Group was the preparation of a multilingual (six languages) dictionary of terms used in the standardization of geographical names.

During the session the experts discussed more than 80 documents prepared on behalf of geographical/linguistic divisions and of countries. Special attention was paid to changes in geographical names in countries where dramatic changes in government structure had taken place.

The Group advised countries to activate the preparation of national legislative documents on the standardization of geographical names and to provide the documents to the Group, to serve as models for those countries which still do not have them. Also discussed

was the creation of databases of geographical names (gazetteers), as well as dissemination of information to the public at large.

The work of the experts at the current session is part of the preparation for the 1997 seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, one of the goals of which is to ensure effective communication, with its concomitant social and economic benefits.

C. Report of the sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (New York, 25 August - 3 September 1992): Corrigendum

Chapter III, resolution 12

The operative paragraph should read:

Recommends that the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names:

- (a) Recognize the working procedures on Antarctic place-names being established by the Working Group on Geodesy and Geographic Information of the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research;
- (b) Establish liaison with the Committee for the purpose of promoting communication between the two bodies and providing the Group of Experts periodically with a written report on relevant activities of the Committee.

D. Calendar of the United Nations and other conferences and meetings

1. 1 - 26 August 1994, Geneva, United Nations Commission on Human Rights - Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, forty-sixth session.
2. 22 August - 2 September 1994, New York, United Nations Preparatory Committee for the World Summit for Social Development, second session.
3. 5 - 13 September 1994, Cairo, United Nations International Conference on Population and Development.
4. 8 September 1994, New York, United Nations, fourteenth Meeting of States Parties to the International Covenant and Political Rights.
5. 20 September - December 1994, New York, United Nations General Assembly, forty-ninth session.

6. 26 - 30 September 1994, Mar del Plata, Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Preparatory Meeting for the fourth World Conference on Women.
7. 6 - 12 November 1994, Buenos Aires, Argentina, the thirtieth meeting of the Council of Directors, Pan-American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH).
8. 6 - 10 November 1994, Amman, Western Asia Regional Preparatory Meeting for the fourth World Conference on Women.
9. 16 - 23 November 1994, Dakar, African Regional Preparatory Meeting for the fourth World Conference on Women.
10. 21 November - 9 December 1994, Geneva, United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, eleventh session.
11. 12 -16 December 1994, Geneva, United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - Pre-sessional Working Group.
12. 16 - 20 July 1995, Singapore, the fifth South-East Asia and the thirty-sixth Australian Surveyors Congress.
13. 3 - 9 September 1995, Barcelona, International Cartographic Association (ICA), seventeenth International Cartographic Conference, tenth General Assembly of ICA.



## II. NEWS FROM THE DIVISIONS

### A. Africa South Division

#### Peter Raper (South Africa)

The national geographical names authority of South Africa, the National Place Names Committee (NPNC), has submitted to Parliament a recommendation on its structure and functions with a view to bringing it into line with relevant resolutions of the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

A South African National Advisory Committee on the Naming of State Water Schemes has been appointed by the Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry.

At the First World Conference of African Linguistics, held at the University of Swaziland from 18 to 22 July 1994, a special session was devoted to problems of the standardization of geographical names from the African languages. It was attended by some 40 delegates from Ethiopia, Germany, Mozambique, Norway, South Africa, Swaziland and Sweden. The most salient problems were identified, and ways to solve them were discussed.

In view of time limitations and the magnitude of the topic, it was recommended that the Survey of Southern African Geographical Names convene meetings of the Nguni, Sotho and Venda/Tsonga Language Boards to solve the problems.

### B. East, Central and South-East Europe Division

#### 1. News from Romania

Letter from Marian Rotaru, Head of the Military Topographic Department, UNGEGN member for Romania, to Mr. Ousmane Gueye, then UNGEGN Secretary.

I was very pleased to receive your letter as well as the "UNGEEN Newsletter" nos. 10/1992 and 11/1993 and would like to thank you very much.

I would like to inform you that those two issues were sent by the Military Topographic Department to all the organizations in Romania, which are working on the standardization of geographical names to be disseminated and applied in their activities.

Together with Mrs. Alexandrina Stanciu, a geographer, I wrote a briefing on those two issues entitled "Present Sources for Information and Documentation on Standardization of Geographical Names" which is to be published in the geographical review "TERRA". After it is published, I will send an issue of this review.

Together with my collaborators, I have also published and presented the following papers:

1) The fifth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for the Americas (New York, 11-15 January 1993, in Review of Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre, Vol.2, no.1, March 1993, pp.48-49).

2) From transliteration and geographical standardization to.....national security. An interview given by the Romanian delegation to the fifth United Nations Conference on Standardization of Geographical Names, Newspaper "Romanian Army" (year 5, no. 11 (170), 17-23 March 1993, p.5).

3) Trends and goals of cartography in the world as a result of the fifth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for the Americas (New York, 11-15 January 1993). Yearly scientific session of the Geographical Section of the Chemistry-Biology-Cartography Faculty, University of Timisoara (26-27 March 1992) and the twenty-fifth scientific session of the Military Technical Academy (10-11 June 1993).

4) New points of view on standardization of geographical names - the sixth United Nations Conference on Standardization of Geographical Names, National Name Day Symposium in Cluj - Napoca, 26-28 October 1993.

5) New developments in standardization of geographical names at the fifteenth meeting of UNGEGN. Review "Geographical Studies and Researches", Tome 39, Romanian Academy, Bucharest, 1993.

6) A new stage in the standardization of geographical names: the sixth United Nations Conference and the sixteenth meeting of UNGEGN. Review "Geographical Studies and Researches", Tome 49, Romanian Academy, Bucharest, 1994 (in printing).

7) Overview and future trends of cartography in the world, in Romania, and to the members of Romanian Cartographic Association. Please find enclosed a copy of this paper.

Looking forward to hearing from you. Thank you once again for the issues you have sent me.

2. The twelfth session of the Division, Budapest, 6-10 September, 1993

Béla Pokoly (Hungary)

The twelfth session of the Division was held in Budapest on 6-10 September 1993. The participation of 23 delegates from nine countries (Albania, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine) signalled the region's growing interest in the subject.

Several countries reported changes in the position of authorities on geographical names in the wake of recent major political events in the region. As always in the group, much interest was focused on the question of exonyms. Progress was reported by some countries in automated toponymic data files (Hungary, Slovakia). As was expected, Albania and Ukraine, the two new participants, attracted most of the attention of the session. Their reporting showed a certain lack of awareness of former United Nations recommendations, and both countries were given oral and written information on the subject. Ukraine has come forward with a romanization system, but stressed that it is still in the experimental stage.

The following items were discussed at the session:

1. Reporting on the sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.
2. Reporting from member countries: national standardization; toponymic data files.
3. Measures taken and proposed to implement United Nations resolutions on the standardization of geographical names.
4. Exonyms.
5. Writing systems and guides to pronunciation.
6. Preparations for representing the Division at the seventeenth session of UNGEGN.
7. Other business.

Item 1. Reporting on the sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

Mr. Béla Pokoly, acting as President of the Division, gave a short summary of the Conference (New York, 25 August - 3 September 1992). The Conference report is not yet available. When received, Mr. Pokoly will send a copy each to those members of the

Division, who could not attend the Conference. Many of the 66 countries represented gave national reports and claimed progress in the field of the standardization of geographical names.

The Conference discussed in detail the key subjects of:

- national programmes;
- technical programmes; and
- international programmes.

The earlier resolutions concerning the setting up of authorities on names, the establishment of toponymic databases, and the call for single romanization systems were reiterated. The usefulness of toponymic training courses also drew attention. Concerning the questions addressed to the Greek, Thai, Russian and Korean representatives on the implementation of the given romanization systems, the representative of Cyprus reassured the session that the language problem of romanizing the Greek writing is a minor one. The ELOT 743 system is used successfully in both Cyprus and Greece, regardless of the language variation forming its basis.

Item 2. Reporting from member countries: national standardization; toponymic data files.

Albania was represented for the first time at the session of the Division. Among other things it reported on the existence since 1973 of the Geographical Names Commission working with the Academy of Sciences. Work is under way on an Albanian etymological dictionary.

Bulgaria primarily reported Decision No. 83 of 1993 of the Council of Ministers ordering the setting up of a new council to be responsible for orthography and transcription of geographical names. The council will start work beginning next year, and its rulings will be binding within Bulgaria. Standardization of forms of geographical names used in Bulgaria will be of great importance.

Hungary gave detailed information on three topics:

- the possibility of using geographical names in languages of non-Hungarian nationalities;
- the new edition of the Hungarian toponymic guidelines for map and other editors; and
- the Hungarian toponymic database (FNT) followed by a technical tour to demonstrate its operation.

Other related work concerning this item are contained in earlier reports, like the one prepared for the 1992 New York Conference.

Cyprus reported that its Permanent Committee for the Standardization of Geographical Names is the competent authority and was set up in 1977 following a decision by the Council

of Ministers. The United Nations-approved ELOT 743 romanization system has been in obligatory use in Cyprus on all documents, including maps, since 1989. Detailed information on all related activities was given in the paper presented by Cyprus at the sixth United Nations Conference.

Poland informed on the work of its two geographical names commissions (Commission for Establishing Names of Localities and Physiographical Objects in the Council of Minister's Office, Committee for Standardization of Geographical Names Outside Poland) and the Department of the Surveyor-General of Poland. The volume "Short Gazetteer of Poland", presented at the 1991 Prague session of the Division, will be sent to the countries not represented at the last two. A toponymic database is in the planning stage; a toponymic guide for maps and other publications was drawn up in 1993.

The Slovak Republic reported on the authorities on names within the newly independent country. Its Interior Ministry plays a key role in the naming of administrative features. Naming physical map features, as well as those outside Slovak territory, is the responsibility of the Geographical Names Commission of the Office of Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre. For ethnically mixed regions Slovak cadastral maps also contain names in Hungarian. The 1993 Toponymic Guidelines for Map and Other Editors were presented at the session. The process of publishing gazetteers of Slovakian districts has continued (nine new volumes since the last session). The toponymic database based on the 1:10,000 topographic series is rapidly being completed.

Slovenia informed on activities of its Commission on Geographical Names. It gives expert opinion on defining both administrative and physical features in Slovenia. Bilingual names in the linguistically mixed areas of Italian and Hungarian minorities are given considerable attention. Work on a toponymic database was started in 1992.

Ukraine reported on the subject for the very first time, since it joined the Division in 1992 only. Standardization of geographical names is done at present by the new Geographical Names Standardization Department of the "Kartografiya" Research and Production Enterprise, initiated by the Main Administration of Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre working under the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. The establishment of a National Council on Geographical Names will shortly be accomplished. The recently passed law on languages allows reproduction of toponyms in the languages of the ethnic majorities of the respective localities. The representative of Ukraine expressed pleasure at joining the work of the Division and asked for methodological and technical assistance in standardizing geographical names.

The Czech Republic informed the session that the Geographical Names Commission at the Czech Office for Surveying, Mapping and Cadastre remained the advisory body for the said office in the field of standardization of geographical names following the establishment of the Czech Republic. The relevant part of the Toponymic Guidelines for Map and Other Editors published in the former Czechoslovakia in 1987 is still valid for the Czech Republic.

