

Statute and Rules of Procedure of the United Nations
Group of Experts on Geographical Names

Statute of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names¹

The United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names was established in pursuance of Economic and Social Council resolutions 715 A (XXVII) of 23 April 1959 and 1314 (XLIV) of 31 May 1968 and the decision taken by the Council at its 1854 meeting, on 4 May 1973, and the decision E/2002/306 of 25 October 2002 to further the standardization of geographical names at both the national and international levels.

I. Aims

The basic aims of the Group of Experts are:

- (a) To emphasize the importance of the standardization of geographical names at the national and international levels and to demonstrate the benefits to be derived from such standardization.
- (b) To collect the results of the work of national and international bodies dealing with the standardization of geographical names and to facilitate the dissemination of these results to Member States of the United Nations.
- (c) To study and propose principles, policies and methods suitable for resolving problems of national and international standardization.
- (d) To play an active role, by facilitating the supply of scientific and technical help, in particular to developing countries, in creating mechanisms for the national and international standardization of geographical names.
- (e) To provide a vehicle for liaison and coordination among Member States, and between Member States and international organizations, on work associated with the standardization of geographical names.
- (f) To implement the tasks assigned as a result of the resolutions adopted at United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

¹Previously adopted by the Group of Experts at its Fifteenth and Sixteenth Sessions, endorsed by the Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, approved by the United Nations Economic and Social Council at its Substantive Session of 1993 (Geneva, 28 June-30 July 1993) item: International Standardization of Geographical Names. The Annex of linguistic/geographical divisions was amended by the Group of Experts at its Twenty-fourth Session in 2007 and at its Twenty-seventh Session in 2012.

II. Principles

1. The Group of Experts shall act as a collegiate, consultative body; accordingly, agreement on non-procedural matters shall be reached by consensus and not by voting.
2. The decisions of the Group of Experts shall be submitted as recommendations to the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names, and, if approved, shall be submitted to the Economic and Social Council for final endorsement, with the request that Member States give them the broadest possible publicity and exposure through appropriate means and channels such as professional organizations, research and scientific institutions, and institutions of higher learning. The decisions of the Group of Experts shall be of a recommendatory character.
3. Questions involving national sovereignty shall not be discussed by the Group of Experts.
4. The Group of Experts in its activities shall adhere to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and to the following provisions:
 - (a) The standardization of geographical names must be based on the achievements of science in relation to both language treatment and the technical means of processing and generating toponymic data;
 - (b) International standardization of geographical names must be carried out on the basis of national standardization.

III. Functions

Functions of the Group of Experts are:

1. To develop procedures and establish mechanisms for standardization in response to national requirements and particular requests;
2. To undertake preparatory work for the periodic United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names; to provide continuity for activities between Conferences; and to provide leadership in the implementation of resolutions adopted at the Conferences;
3. To encourage the discussion and study of practical and theoretical steps directed towards standardization;
4. To co-ordinate the activities of linguistic/geographical divisions formed to further the work at the national level; to encourage the active participation of countries and divisions; and to promote a degree of uniformity in the work undertaken;

5. To create any necessary structure to supplement the work of divisions and to deal with issues beyond the scope of a division;
6. To develop appropriate programmes to assist with training in individual countries and groups of countries, to achieve standardization where it is lacking;
7. To make mapping organizations aware of the importance of using standardized geographical names;
8. To maintain liaison with international organizations dealing with related subjects and to encourage UNGEGN divisions to participate in the United Nations regional or other cartographic conferences;
9. To work at the highest possible national, international and United Nations levels to interrelate toponymy and cartography;
10. To make standardization principles and standardized geographical names available as practical information for as wide a user community as possible, through all appropriate media.

IV. Composition

1. Linguistic/geographical divisions

1. The Group of Experts shall be composed of experts from linguistic/geographical divisions designated by Governments. The Group of Experts shall be headed by elected officers who shall guide the activities of the Group during and between its sessions.
2. The Group of Experts shall be supported in its activities by linguistic/geographical divisions listed in the Annex of this Statute.
3. The number of linguistic/geographical divisions and their compositions may be revised, if necessary.
4. A country shall decide for itself the division to which it wishes to belong. A country may be a member of another division provided the nature of its participation does not change the linguistic/geographical character of the division(s) concerned. An expert may be invited to attend meetings of other divisions in the capacity of observer or consultant.
5. Each division, if composed of more than one sovereign State, shall select, by methods of its own choosing, an expert to represent the division (Division Chairperson) as a whole at the meetings of the Group of Experts.
6. In order to guarantee the continuity of the work, each Division having more than one sovereign State shall select an alternative representative; the divisional representative shall act in close contact with his or her alternate.

7. The divisional representative shall stimulate activities in the standardization of geographical names within his or her division by all appropriate means (correspondence with national bodies on the standardization of geographical names and national surveying and mapping agencies; organization of meetings of the divisional experts).
8. The divisional representative shall be responsible for ensuring that the work of the Group of Experts and its potential for technical assistance are brought to the attention of the individual countries in his or her division and for reporting to the United Nations any special problems in the division.
9. To discuss technical and procedural matters, a division may organize regional meetings during United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names and meetings of the Group of Experts, or at any other appropriate time.

2. Officers

1. The Group of Experts shall elect the following officers: a chairperson, two Vice-Chairpersons and two Rapporteurs.
2. All provisions regarding the election and functioning of the officers are given below in the rules of procedure of the Group.
3. Working groups
 1. Working groups shall be disbanded upon completion of their appointed tasks. The expediency of extending the term of their activities shall be considered at the sessions of the Group of Experts. If necessary, new working groups may be appointed and their tasks determined.
 2. The convenor and the co-convenor of a working group shall be elected at the meetings of the working group by methods of its own choosing.

Annex

Linguistic/geographical divisions of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names:

Africa Central Division;
Africa East Division;
Africa South Division;
Africa West Division;
Arabic Division;
Asia East Division (other than China);
Asia South-East Division;
Asia South-West Division (other than Arabic);
Baltic Division;
Celtic Division;
China Division;
Dutch- and German-speaking Division;
East Central and South-East Europe Division;
Eastern Europe, Northern and Central Asia Division;
East Mediterranean Division (other than Arabic);
French-speaking Division;
India Division;
Latin America Division;
Norden Division;
Pacific South-West Division;
Portuguese-speaking Division.
Romano-Hellenic Division;
United Kingdom Division;
United States of America/Canada Division.

Rules of procedure of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names

I Definitions

Meaning of terms

Rule 1

For the purposes of these rules, the following terms shall have the meanings indicated:

(a) "Group" or "Group of Experts" means the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, established in pursuance of Economic and Social Council resolutions 715 A (XXVII) of 23 April 1959 and 1314 (XLIV) of 31 May 1968, and the decision taken by the Council at its 1,854th meeting, on 4 May 1973;

(b) "Member" means an expert participating in a session of the Group, whether or not he or she represents a division;

(c) "Division" means one of the major linguistic/geographical divisions of the world, as defined in section IV of the statute of the Group;

(d) "Secretary-General" means the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

II. Membership and composition

Rule 2

1. The Group of Experts shall consist of experts in the field of cartography/linguistics, designated by Governments of States Members of the respective divisions.

2. The expert who represents a division shall be a full member of the Group, with voting rights. In addition, States Members of the divisions may appoint national experts who may participate, without the right to vote, in the discussions at meetings of the Group. Attendance at Group meetings by the latter experts shall be coordinated with the expert representing the division in question, who shall have the right to vote on behalf of the division.

3. All experts participating in sessions of the Group shall serve in their personal capacity as individuals of recognized competence and experience in their respective fields.

III. Sessions

Rule 3

The Group shall normally hold one session every two years, at such time as it determines; in years when a United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names is held, the Group shall meet, as required, on dates immediately preceding the opening date of the Conference and immediately following the closing date of the Conference.

IV. Agenda

Rule 4

The provisional agenda drawn up by the Group at its previous session and communicated to the Governments invited by the Secretary-General to send experts to participate in the session shall constitute the provisional agenda for the session. Experts participating in the session may propose additional items for inclusion in the provisional agenda.

V. Officers

Election and term of office

Rule 5

The Group shall elect the following officers from among the experts representing divisions: a chairperson; two Vice-Chairpersons and two Rapporteurs.

Rule 6

The officers shall be elected immediately following the closing date of the respective United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. The officers shall serve until their successors are elected immediately after the next Conference.

Replacement

Rule 7

1. If the Chairperson is to be absent from a meeting or part thereof or if he or she ceases to be able to perform his or her functions, one of the Vice-Chairpersons or, in their or absence, one of the Rapporteurs shall act as a Chairperson.

2. A Vice-Chairperson or Rapporteur, when acting as Chairperson, shall have the same powers and duties as the Chairperson.

3. If none of the Vice-Chairperson or the Rapporteurs is able to perform the functions of office, the Chairperson shall appoint an expert to complete the unexpired portion of either term of office.

VI. Secretariat

Duties of the Secretariat

Rule 8

The Secretary of the Group, appointed by the Secretary-General, shall act in that capacity in all meetings of the Group. He or she may designate a member of the Secretariat to take his place at any meeting.

Rule 9

The Secretary shall as far as possible provide and direct such staff as is required by the Group. He or she shall be responsible for making all necessary arrangements for meetings and generally shall perform all other work which the Group may require.

Statements by the Secretariat

Rule 10

The Secretary or his or her representative may at any meeting make either oral or written statements concerning any questions under consideration.

VII. Conduct of business

Quorum

Rule 11

A majority of the representatives of divisions participating in the session shall constitute a quorum.

General powers of the Chairperson

Rule 12

In addition to exercising the powers conferred upon him or her elsewhere by these rules, the Chairperson shall declare the opening and closing of each meeting of the Group, direct the discussion at such meetings, ensure the observance of these rules, accord the right to speak, put questions to the vote and announce decisions. He or she shall rule on the points of order and, subject to these rules, shall have complete control over the proceedings of the Group and over the maintenance of order of its meetings.

Rule 13

The Chairperson may, in the course of the discussions, propose to the Group the closing of the list of speakers or the adjournment or closure of the debate. He or she may call a speaker to order if his or her remarks are not relevant to the matter under discussion. The Chairperson may also propose the suspension or the adjournment of the meeting.

Rule 14

The Chairperson, in the exercise of his or her functions, remains under the authority of the Group.

Points of order

Rule 15

During the discussion of any matter, a member may at any time raise a point of order, which shall be immediately decided by the Chairperson in accordance with these rules. A member may appeal against the ruling of the Chairperson. The appeal shall be immediately put to the vote, and the Chairperson's ruling shall stand, unless overruled by a majority of the representatives of divisions present and voting. A member may not, in raising a point of order, speak on the substance of the matter under discussion.

Time limit on speeches

Rule 16

The Group may limit the time allowed to each speaker and the number of times a member may speak on any question. When the debate is limited and a member exceeds his or her allotted time, the Chairperson shall call him or her to order without delay.

Closing of list of speakers

Rule 17

During the course of a debate, the Chairperson may announce the list of speakers and, with the consent of the Group, declare the list closed. The Chairperson may, however, accord the right of reply to any member if, in his or her opinion, a speech delivered after he or she had declared the list closed makes this desirable. When there are no more speakers, the Chairperson shall, with the consent of the Group, declare the debate closed. Such closure shall have the same effect as closure pursuant to rule 19.

Adjournment of debate

Rule 18

During the discussion of any matter, a member may move the adjournment of the debate on the item under discussion. Any such motion shall have priority. In addition to the proposal of the motion, one member shall be allowed to speak in favour of, and one member against, the motion, after which the motion shall be immediately put to the vote.

Closure of debate

Rule 19

A member may at any time move the closure of the debate on the item under discussion, whether or not any other member has signified his or her wish to speak. Permission to speak on the motion shall be accorded to only two speakers opposing the closure, after which the motion shall be immediately put to the vote.

Withdrawal of proposals or motions

Rule 20

A proposal or a motion may be withdrawn by its sponsor at any time before voting on it has commenced, provided that it has not been amended. A proposal or a motion thus withdrawn may be reintroduced by any member.

Reconsideration of proposals

Rule 21

When a proposal has been adopted or rejected, it may not be reconsidered at the same session unless the Group, by a two-thirds majority of the representatives of divisions present and voting, so decides. Permission to speak on a motion to reconsider shall be accorded to only two speakers opposing the motion, after which it shall be immediately put to the vote.

Invitations to specialists (technical advisers)

Rule 22

A person with specialized knowledge of particular aspects of the standardization of geographical names may be invited to place before the Group of Expert his or her specialized knowledge. Such a person will be invited only when official approval of the invitation has been obtained from his or her Government.

VIII. Decision-making

Consensus

Rule 23

1. On all except procedural matters, the Group of Experts, its linguistic/geographical divisions and its working groups shall arrive at decisions by consensus. In the event that a consensus is not achieved, the matter shall be deferred for reworking and re-submission.
2. In the absence of a consensus on procedural matters, the Chairperson may and, at the request of any member, shall put the proposal to the vote.

Voting rights and majority required

Rule 24

1. Each expert representing a division shall have one vote, and decisions of the Group shall, subject to rule 23, be taken by a majority of the divisional representatives present and voting.
2. If a vote is equally divided, a second vote shall be taken after an adjournment of the meeting for 15 minutes. If this vote is also equally divided, the proposal or motion shall be regarded as rejected.

Meaning of the phrase "representatives of Divisions present and voting"

Rule 25

For the purpose of these rules, the phrase "representative of divisions present and voting" means representatives of divisions casting an affirmative or negative vote. Representatives of divisions who abstain from voting shall be considered as not voting.

Roll-call votes

Rule 26

A roll-call vote, if requested, shall be taken in the English alphabetical order of the names of the divisions, beginning with the division whose name is drawn by lot by the Chairperson.

Conduct during voting

Rule 27

After the Chairperson has announced the commencement of voting, no member shall interrupt the voting except on a point of order in connection with the actual conduct

of the voting. Explanations of their votes by members may, however, be permitted by the Chairperson either before or after the voting. The Chairperson may limit the time to be allowed for such explanations.

Division of proposals

Rule 28

Parts of a proposal shall be voted on separately if a member requests that the proposal be divided. Those parts of the proposals that have been approved shall then be put to the vote as a whole; if all the operative parts of the proposals have been rejected, the proposal shall be considered rejected as a whole.

Order of voting on amendments

Rule 29

When an amendment is moved to a proposal, the amendment shall be voted on first. When two or more amendments are moved to a proposal, the Group shall first vote on the amendment furthest removed in substance from the original proposal and then on the amendment next furthest removed therefrom, and so on, until all the amendments have been put to the vote. When however, the adoption of one amendment necessarily implies the rejection of another amendment, the latter amendment shall not be put to the vote. If one or more amendments are adopted, the amended proposal shall then be voted upon. A proposal is considered an amendment to another proposal if it merely adds to, deletes from or revises part of that proposal.

Order of voting on proposals

Rule 30

1. If two or more proposals relate to the same question, they shall, unless the Group decides otherwise, be voted on in the order in which they are submitted. The Group may, after each vote on a proposal, decide whether to vote on the next proposal.
2. Revised proposals shall be voted on in the order in which the original proposals were submitted, unless the revision substantially departs from the original proposal. In that case, the original proposal shall be considered as withdrawn and the revised proposal shall be treated as a new proposal.
3. A motion requiring that no decision be taken on a proposal shall have priority over that proposal.

Elections

Rule 31

1. All elections shall be held by secret ballot unless the Committee decides otherwise.
2. When candidates are to be nominated, each nomination shall be made by only one member, after which the Group shall immediately proceed to the election.

Balloting

Rule 32

1. When one or more elective places are to be filled at one time under the same conditions, each member may cast a vote for as many candidates as there are places to be filled, and those candidates, in a number not exceeding the number of such places, obtaining in the first ballot a majority of the votes cast and the largest number of votes shall be elected.
2. If the number of candidates so elected is less than the number of places to be filled, additional ballots shall be held to fill the remaining places. From such ballots the candidates obtaining the least number of votes in the previous ballot may be eliminated on the proposal of the Chairperson.
3. In that case of a tie among candidates obtaining a majority of the votes cast, a second ballot shall be held among them. If the votes remain equally divided, the elder or eldest candidate shall be elected.

IX. Languages

Official and working languages

Rule 33

Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish shall be the official languages and English, French and Spanish shall be the working languages of the session. Working papers shall be submitted in one of the working languages.

Interpretation

Rule 34

1. Speeches made in an official language shall be interpreted into the other official languages of the session.
2. Any member may make a speech in a language other than an official language of the session if he or she provides for interpretation into one such language. Interpretation into the other official languages of the session by the interpreters of the Secretariat may be based on the interpretation given in the first such language.

X. Documents

Rule 35

1. The secretariat of the Group of Experts circulates copies of working papers submitted by linguistic/geographical divisions and experts to the participants of the session.
2. Submission of a working paper for consideration by the Group of Experts does not mean the document has received the approval of the Group of Experts or that the working paper has been endorsed by it.
3. Consideration of a working paper by the Group of Experts is without political significance.
4. Consideration and discussion of a working paper by the Group of Experts must not be interpreted as support of, or opposition to, any political view or issue.
5. Subsequent reference to the working papers in the report of the Group of Experts on the Session likewise shall have no political significance.

XI. Records

Records of meetings and of the session

Rule 36

Sound recordings of the plenary meetings of the session shall be made and kept by the Secretariat. The Group shall prepare a final report in English as the record of the session. This report shall be distributed by the Secretariat as soon as possible after the closing of the session.

XII. Privacy of meetings

Rule 37

The meetings of the Group of Experts and meetings of its working groups shall be held in private.

XIII. Sessional bodies and working groups

Sessional bodies

Rule 38

During sessions of the Group, ad hoc study groups may be appointed to deal with particular issues. Upon completion of their appointed tasks, such groups shall be automatically disbanded before the end of the session, unless especially directed to remain in existence.

Inter-sessional working groups

Rule 39

The Group of Experts may establish working groups of specialists under the chairmanship of one of the national experts referred to in rule 2, to study particular problems between sessions of the Group.

Rules of procedure

Rule 40

So far as they are applicable, the rules of procedure of the Group of Experts shall apply to the proceedings of the sessional bodies and working groups. These bodies may, however, dispense with certain language interpretations.

XIV. Participation by non-members of the Group

Rule 41

1. Representatives designated by the specialized agencies and observers designated by other intergovernmental organizations and by non-governmental organizations invited to the session may participate, without the right to vote, in the deliberations of the Group and its working groups, on the invitation of the Chairperson or the convenor of a working group, on questions within the scope of their activities.

2. Written statements submitted by these representatives or observers shall be distributed by the Secretariat to all participants in the session.

XV. Amendments

Rule 42

These rules of procedure may be amended by a decision of the Group, taken by a two-thirds majority of the divisional representatives present and voting. No amendment shall become effective until it has been approved by the Economic and Social Council.