

Opening Remarks

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Dr. Tiangco, Directors, Assistant Directors, Ms. Blake, distinguished guests, dear colleagues, dear participants ... Magandang umaga.

It is a great pleasure to have this opportunity to speak to you as we embark together on this toponymy training course. The United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) has been offering training courses since 1982 when the first course was held in Indonesia. Although since then several courses have taken place within the Asia South-East Division of UNGEGN, this is the first in the Philippines and the first to include marine toponymy.

I sincerely thank the management of NAMRIA and all those involved in the organization who have so successfully brought this UNGEGN toponymic training course to fruition ... including the financing, the arrangements, and the fine hospitality being offered. A particular “thank you” goes to “M-J” Mary Jane Montemor and her team, who have worked so diligently with us in the preparations!

It is certainly no small task to bring together participants from different parts of the Division to spend a week learning, sharing experiences and discussing aspects of geographical names standardization. With representatives from the Philippines, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam the course certainly has a truly international flavour. In addition, the instructors have come

in from the Netherlands, Germany, Jamaica/UN, Canada, Indonesia, and the Republic of Korea.

I also give our thanks to Stefan Schweinfest, Cecille Blake and staff of the UN Statistics Division who provide the Secretariat for UNGEGN and also have been instrumental in making generous funds available for the participation of students from outside the Philippines.

Geographical names can be a hard sell! To everyone the importance of clean drinking water and adequate shelter are very clear; so, too, are the benefits of education, a guaranteed food supply and a good transportation network. But often less obvious is the significance to a country of its spatially organized information – or national spatial data infrastructure (NSDI), which has the potential to provide great economic benefits. And how do we access this information? The logical way for most of us is by the name of a place or feature. Geographical names then become key entry points to location-based information and services. But what geographical names (or toponyms) should we be using? Who is responsible for them? What language are they in? How are they spelled? For such decisions a national names authority is recommended. Some countries participating here in Manila do have such an authority; others are looking to establish one.

It is basic that we should find ways of collecting the geographical names used by local communities, of recording them accurately, then authorizing names for official use, storing them in a database and disseminating this information widely. Whether we are using the latest technology or more traditional written methods,

many of the principles of geographical names standardization remain the same ... as names reflect our languages, our cultures and our identities, and form a significant element of all information that addresses “space” or more particularly “place”.

This course is led by Prof. Ferjan Ormeling from the Netherlands, until a few months ago a Vice-Chair of UNGEGN and Convenor of UNGEGN’s Working Group on Training Courses in Toponymy, and his team includes:

- Pier-Giorgio Zaccheddu from Germany, Convenor of the Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers,
- Prof. Mia Lauder from Indonesia, an expert in cultural issues,
- Prof. Hyo Hyun Sung from the Republic of Korea, an expert in undersea and maritime feature naming,
- Cecille Blake, of the UNGEGN Secretariat at UNHQ in New York,
- and myself, formerly in charge of the geographical names standardization programme in Canada.
- A number of individuals from NAMRIA and from academia will round out the team.

The week will include lectures, fieldwork, authorizing names collected through a mock board, and construction of toponymic databases. You will have seen the agenda, but in brief we will include principles of naming, terminology, why we should standardize geographical names, types of names authorities, historic and cultural aspects of names, preparing for and undertaking fieldwork, processing the results and submitting names for authorization, creation of toponymic

databases and products from them, names servers, special aspects of naming marine and underwater features, various aspects of names use - their applications and dissemination, as well as the role of UNGEGN.

We hope this will provide each of you an insight into the practical aspects of toponymy applicable to administration of names programmes.

I thank all the organizers, the instructors and you – the participants – for coming here!

Following the tradition of other UNGEGN training courses, I wish everyone a very interesting week of activities, valuable experiences in geographical names and new friendships and networks to help you carry forward your tasks once you return to the office.

Thank you so much for your attention. Maraming salamat.