United Nations, UNGEGN, and support for national geographical names standardization programmes

Helen Kerfoot, UNGEGN
Cecille Blake, UNGEGN Secretariat
What is important to know?

• Background on UNGEGN and its aims
• Participation from countries
• How does UN/UNGEGN function
  – Divisions and working groups
• Materials available – UNGEGN website
  – Publications; documents; contacts
  – World Geographical Names Database
  – Other support
• Recent changes to organization
UN Conferences and UNGEGN

• UN Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN) – since 1967
  – 11 Conferences, every five years
  – promotes national standardization as the basis of international standardization
    • starting with resolution I/4

• UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names
  – follows up Conference resolutions
  – assures continuity of work
    • networking; best practices; exchange ideas; new projects

Countries – first time
- 2002 – 10
- 2007 to 2017 – 12
- 156 countries have participated (UN 193 + 2)
- 13 countries represented at all 11 conferences
- 12 SE Asia countries
UNCSGN resolutions

- Conference resolutions reflect the technical work discussed
- From 11 Conferences - 211 resolutions assembled and grouped by subject area (26 groups)
  - Refer to: national standardization; systems of romanization; distribution of data through gazetteers (hard copy/web); data exchange in accepted formats; training and education; tools, toponymic guidelines; exonyms ....
UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names

- one of expert groups of ECOSOC
- follows up on implementation of resolutions
- provides continuity between conferences
- convenes between conferences (2) … 30 sessions
- supported by a Secretariat at UNHQ (NY)
- creates working groups
to follow up on resolutions
- has 24 geographical/linguistic divisions for grass roots work
UN Conference/UNGE GN aims

• See national names authorities created
  – backed by legislation
  – respect local usage of names
  – collect, store and disseminate authorized names
  • for government and public use

• Develop single scientifically-based systems of romanization

• Today - encourage multi-national datasets
UNGEGN structure

UN Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN)

UNGEGN Secretariat (UN Statistics Division)

UNGEGN Bureau

UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN)

UNGEGN liaison with scientific groups

W o r k i n g g r o u p s

Country Names
Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers
Publicity and Funding
Toponymic Terminology
Romanization Systems
Training Courses in Toponymy
Evaluation & Implementation
Exonyms
Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage

D i v i s i o n s
24 linguistic/geographical divisions

Task Team for Africa
Toponymic Guidelines Coordinator
... UNGEGN working groups

Romanization
Training
Data files / gazetteers
Evaluation / implementation
Terminology
Exonyms
Country names
Cultural heritage
Task Team for Africa
Coordination of Toponymic Guidelines

Publicity / funding
**WG - Toponymic data files and gazetteers**

- Major tasks to promote consistency of data
  - development and maintenance of digital toponymic files and data bases
  - gazetteers (hard copy and digital)
  - data exchange formats and standards
  - liaison with ISO TC211 and Unicode consortium
  - need to be a focal point for info on software
  - processes for VGI and crowd-sourced data
  - definitions of general feature types/categories
  - updates for technical manual
  - relationship with UNGGIM

Website: https://wiki.gdi-de.org/display/wgtdfg/
WG - Training courses in Toponymy

- Courses offered to international audiences since 1982 - in various languages and locations
- Collection of course outlines, etc. available
- To reach a larger audience ... moving towards web-based courses
  - unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNEGGN/docs/_data_ICAcourses/index.html (developed with ICA)
  - also in French (Div. Francophone) and in Spanish (PAIGH)
- New advanced manual online
WG – Training courses in toponymy

Offering training courses and developing web-based training
WG - Toponymic terminology

- Need for commonly recognized terminology for any discipline
- First Glossary was published by the UN in 1984
- Updated and expanded Glossary in 2002 ... six languages of UN; 375 terms
- Into maintenance phase - first additions and changes on UNGEGN website, 2007
- Establishing database of terminology
WG – Geographical names as cultural heritage

- Aim to promote the work being done on cultural heritage, including indigenous, or minority and regional group names
- Retention / revitalization of cultures through toponyms
- Compile guidelines; gather legislation and principles for recording and use of names in cultural context; dialogue with other groups
UNGEGN Divisions

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

Bhutan
Brunei Darussalam
Cambodia
Indonesia
Lao People's Democratic Republic
Malaysia
Myanmar
Philippines
Singapore
Sri Lanka
Thailand
Viet Nam

Division website .... http://asedivision-ungegn.org/
Participation at UN Conferences

- Thailand 9
- Malaysia 8
- Viet Nam 7
- Indonesia 6
- Philippines 6
- Brunei Darussalam 4
- Lao People's Democratic Republic 4
- Sri Lanka 4
- Cambodia 3
- Singapore 3
- Myanmar 2
- Bhutan 1
UNGEIGN – here to help!

- Publications
  - Manuals
  - Brochures
  - Reports of Conferences and UNGEIGN Sessions

- UNGEIGN website:
  - unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/ungegn/
    - Publications noted; UN resolutions
    - Links to national authorities and databases
    - Documents from UN Conferences and UNGEIGN
    - Example documents from various countries
    - UNGEIGN Information Bulletin
    - UNGEIGN World GeoNames Database
UNITED NATIONS GROUP OF EXPERTS ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES (UNEGGN)

In 1959, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) paved the way for a small group of experts to meet and provide technical recommendations on standardizing geographical names at the national and international levels. This meeting gave rise to the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNEGGN) and the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNEGGN). The UNEGNN is held every five years, and UNEGNN meets between the Conferences to follow up the implementation of resolutions adopted by the Conferences and to ensure continuity of activities between Conferences. Today, UNEGNN is one of the seven standing expert bodies of ECOSOC, with over 400 members from over 100 countries.

Outside its meetings, UNEGNN functions through 34 geographical/linguistic divisions and through working groups; currently addressing issues of training courses, digital data files and gazetteers, romanization systems, country names, terminology, publicity and funding, and topographic guidelines.

A multilingual, multisciptual and geo-referenced database of names for countries, capitals and major cities

Upcoming meeting

The next Plenary meeting will be held from 29 April to 3 May 2019.

Upcoming events

Regional Training Program in Toponymy, including Marine Toponymy
19-24 March 2018, Manila, Philippines
Coordinator: Mary Jane Monsero

Meeting of the UNEGNN Working Group on Country Names
19 March 2018, Paris (France, IGN Saint-Mandé)
Coordinator (in English) Catherine Cheetham
Coordinator (in French) Élisabeth Calvarin

Meeting of the UNEGNN Working Group on Romanization Systems
20 March 2018, Paris (France, IGN Saint-Mandé)
Coordinator (in English) Catherine Cheetham
Coordinator (in French) Élisabeth Calvarin

Recent conferences and sessions

The 50th Session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNEGNN) was held in New York on 7 and 18 August 2017.

The 11th Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNEGNN) was held in New York from 8-17 August 2017...
National Names Authorities

Documents

- Summary world map of Authorities, as of July 2016
- Summary List of Authorities, as of September 2016
- Contact Information on National Geographical Names Authorities, as of September 2016
- Links by countries to National Names Authorities and other related websites

Useful reference documents (examples from national names authorities)

Overview - names authorities and procedures for naming

- Estonia overview (English)
- Norway overview (English)
- South Africa overview (English)

Legislation for a names authority

- Canada, Order in Council - Canada, Décret en conseil
- New Zealand Geographic Board (Nga Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa) Act, 2008
- Tunisie, Décret du 2013 - Arabic version
Policies, principles and procedures for geographical naming

- Canada, Principes et directives
- Indonesia, Principles, Policies and Procedures
- USA, Principles, Policies and Procedures: Domestic Geographic Names

Place names acts

- Estonia Place Names Act (English)
- Norway Place Names Act (English)
- Poland Place Names Act (English)

Information publicizing the work of names authorities

Annual reports of names authorities

- New Zealand Geographic Board Nga Pou Tauhana o Aotearoa, Annual Report, 2008-2009

Forms for public submission of names

- Denmark names collection form: blank form (English translation) - Denmark names collection form: completed form (in Danish)
- New Zealand places and features
- New Zealand guiding notes for places and features
- New Zealand undersea features
- New Zealand guiding notes for undersea features
Meeting of toponymy authorities, 6 September 2011, at ICOS XIV, Barcelona, Spain

Welcome (Yvonne Griley)
Introduction (Helen Kerfoot)
National committees - centralized
Estonia (Peeter Päll)
Republic of Korea (Sungjae Choo)
National/regional committees
Spain (Marta Montilla) and Catalonia (Francesc Vilaró)
Australia (Laura Kostanski)
Input of language specialists
Norway (Botolv Helleland)
Country without a geographical names authority
Netherlands (Ferjan Ormeling)
Concluding remarks (Helen Kerfoot)
Words of thanks (Yvonne Griley)

Short UNGEGN lunch-time presentation, GGIM High Level Forum, Seoul, October 24-26, 2011

UNEGGN - what, why, how and relevance to GGIM
Le GENGUN et la normalisation des noms géographiques en Afrique
UNEGGN Geographical Names Database
UNEGGN - names and mapping / GIS
UNEGGN - cultural connections
EUrOGeoNames - data network
UNEGGN - national names authorities and GGIM
UNGEGN World Geonames Database

• Access through UNGEGN web site
• To include names (geo-referenced) of:
  – Countries and capitals
    • 6 UN languages
    • Language(s) of country
  – Cities > 100,000
• Original writing system + romanization
• Audio for endonymys
• In future to add: Variant names – exonyms, historical …
United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNEGN)

In 1959, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) paved the way for a small group of experts to meet and provide technical recommendations on standardizing geographical names at the national and international levels. This meeting gave rise to the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN) and to the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNEGN). The UNCSGN is held every five years, and UNEGNN meets between the Conferences to follow-up the implementation of the resolutions adopted by the Conferences and to ensure continuity of activities between Conferences. Today, UNEGNN is composed of over 400 members from over 100 countries.

Outside its meetings, UNEGNN functions through a Secretariat, currently addressing issues of training, terminology, public policy and funding, and toponyms. It promotes a multilingual, multiscriptual and geo-referenced database of names for countries, capitals and major cities.

A multilingual, multiscriptual and geo-referenced database of names for countries, capitals and major cities

Upcoming meeting

The next Plenary meeting will be held from 29 April to 3 May 2019.

Upcoming events

Regional Training Program in Toponomy, including Marine Toponomy
19–24 March 2018, Manila, Philippines
Coordinator: Mary Jane Montemor
UNGEVN World Geographical Names
Multilingual, multisciptual dataset of names of countries, capitals and major cities.

Geographical Names Database | About | FAQ | Feedback | Contact

Select a country to zoom in and list the names below the map
Select a country to zoom in and list the names below the map

- World
- Afghanistan
- Albania
- Algeria
- Andorra
- Angola
- Antigua and Barbuda
- Argentina
- Armenia
- Australia
- Austria
- Azerbaijan
- Bahamas (the)
- Bahrain
- Bangladesh
- Barbados
- Belarus
- Belgium
- Belize
- Benin
- Bhutan
- Boliva (Plunnational State of)
- Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Botswana
- Brazil
- Brunei Darussalam
- Bulgaria
- Burkina Faso
- Burundi

Notes:
- The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. The source for the file is UNGEVB.
- The Arabic fonts are not connected at this stage due to technical problems.
SE Asia – capitals and cities
Roll over a country to display the country name in the six UN languages. Point to a city to see the city endonyms (where available and in romanized form only) and the English name. Capital cities are shown in red, other cities are shown in green.

Note: Depending on the computer settings, some names might not be able to be displayed properly.
### Capital city

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>City name</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>Brasília</td>
<td>UNGEGN</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**United Nations Languages**

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<thead>
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<tbody>
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<td>برازيليا</td>
<td>UN terms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>巴西利亚</td>
<td>UN terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
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<td>UN terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>Brasilia</td>
<td>UN terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>Бразилия</td>
<td>UN terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
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<td>UN terms</td>
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### Other major cities

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**Endonym**

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</table>

<table>
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<th>Long: -52.34</th>
<th>Pelotas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Long: -54.11</td>
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<td>Long: -51.02</td>
<td>Viamão</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lat: -30.03</td>
<td>Long: -51.23</td>
<td>Porto Alegre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>City/town data</td>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brunei Darussalam</td>
<td>Yes?</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lao People's Democratic Republic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
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<td>Myanmar</td>
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<td>Philippines</td>
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<td>Sri Lanka</td>
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<td>Thailand</td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
New arrangements for UNGEGN

New developments in the UNGEGN World Geographical Names Database
New UNGEGN structure

- UNGEGN Bureau
- UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN)
- UNGEGN Secretariat (UN Statistics Division)

Working groups:
- Country Names
- Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers
- Publicity and Funding
- Toponymic Terminology
- Romanization Systems
- Training Courses in Toponymy
- Evaluation & Implementation
- Exonyms
- Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage

Divisions:
- 24 linguistic/geographical divisions

Task Team for Africa
Toponymic Guidelines Coordinator
UNEGGN liaison with scientific groups
Looking to the future … for improved communication and a world at peace

unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo
Continuing need for standardization

• Important advances - technology and communication
  – potentially a growing audience
  – sending and receiving data → easier

• This progress increases expectations
  – data must be reliable – accurate and up to date
  – not always easy to meet expectations

• Toponyms are indispensable components of all spatially-referenced information systems
  … Google Earth, etc.