

Statement by the Delegate of the Republic of Korea
Delivered at the 11th United Nations
Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names
Under Agenda Item 17
“Features Beyond a Single Sovereignty and International Cooperation”

Statement by the Delegate of the Republic of Korea at the 11th United Nations
Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, 2017

Thank you Mr. Chair.

I feel privileged and honored to have this opportunity to report to the Conference the current status of the geographical name “East Sea” which refers to the sea body surrounded by the Korean Peninsula, Russia, and the Japanese Archipelago.

Since the 6th United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in 1992, the delegation of the Republic of Korea has made it clear repeatedly at the Conference under the agenda “Features Beyond a Single Sovereignty and International Cooperation,” that the sea body mentioned should be named as “East Sea” which has been used by the Korean people for more than two thousand years and has naturally become a part of their life, culture, and history.

At the same time, the Republic of Korea has suggested using “East Sea” concurrently with the other name until the countries concerned would reach an agreement on fixing a single name for the sea body, in accordance with the UNCSGN Resolution III/20 on the “Names of Features Beyond a Single Sovereignty” adopted at the 3rd Conference in 1977 which recommended that “when countries sharing a given geographical feature do not succeed in agreeing on a common name, it should be a general rule of international cartography that the name used by each of the countries concerned will be accepted”.

Although the Republic of Korea and the countries concerned have not been able to reach an agreement to resolve this toponymic issue, I am very happy to report that the reasonable stance of the Republic of Korea has been recognized and accepted world-wide, and cases of the said sea body being referred to as the term “East Sea” have remarkably increased both in the public and private sectors of the world, particularly since the last Conference of 2012.

Many of the world’s renowned cartographic publishers and online map providers currently use the term “East Sea” in their products. Geography and history textbooks in various countries also refer to the term “East Sea” when the other name is referred to, in order to introduce this case to students as one of the most significant examples of geographic naming disputes in the international community, and also as a noticeable example demonstrating that reasonable measures have been searched for and suggested by an international expert group as well as by those directly involved to solve this problem.

This trend in the world assures me there is no need to repeat here the legitimacy of the name “East Sea.” The Republic of Korea will, instead, continue to do its best to resolve the issue through bilateral negotiations and multilateral consultations.

Mr. Chair, if I may, since the following should have been raised under Agenda item 13 “Terminology in the Standardization of Geographical Names,” I would like to finish my statement by drawing the kind attention of distinguished delegates to the question whether it would be acceptable to use the term “internationally established name” on academic and scientific occasions of toponymy or cartography.

Experts from the Republic of Korea, and hopefully other UNGEGN experts, commonly agree that it is difficult to find such terms not only in “the Glossary of Terms for the

Standardization of Geographical Names” but also in other reference materials, and that there is no international authority empowered to “establish” geographical names.

In this respect, the rationale and role of the Conference are very important to discuss these problems and search for measures to “standardize” geographical names.

Thank you very much for the attention.