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Geographical names as culture, heritage and identity

(including indigenous, minority and regional language names)

Palestine National Committee on Geographic Names (PNCGN)

Submitted by the State of Palestine**

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** Prepared by Jamal Numan, GIS\Civil Engineer, Head of geomolg Portal for Spatial Information, Ministry of Local Government, State of Palestine

Palestine National Committee on Geographic Names (PNCGN)

Document in support of Agenda item#10: Geographical names as culture, heritage and identity (including indigenous, minority and regional language names).

Geographical names are an important component of the Civilization and culture of any country. Every language and each community and nation has its own set of geographical names. That set is also an evidence of the historical development of that nation and its contacts with other nations and languages.

Therefore, for Palestine, geographical names are more than just labels on a map; they are a connecting link between the Palestinian man and his land and history. History of any country and nation is always an important part of shaping its future; it is for Palestinian people, who most of it live in the diaspora as refugees, even a more important part of his attempts and dream of building their state.

This importance and effect of the geographical names socially and economically, has been the reason why the United Nations, with the decision of the Economic and Social Council in April 1961, undertook international efforts for implementing the standardization of geographical names. The state of Palestine complying with this mandate, and complying with the related UN resolutions, formed the Palestinian Committee for Geographical Names.

The Palestinian Committee for Geographical Names recorded around 20 thousand names in the occupied West Bank, of which 92% are of Arabic origins, and 8% are of other origins such as Hebrew, Persian, Roman, and Turkish origins.

It has been found that every name has a meaning taken from the natural (topography and geomorphology) and human and social environments (culture and heritage). It is obvious that original names of sites in Palestine are results of interaction between people and their geographical environment.

This contribution describes the status of the original Geographical names in the West Bank (occupied in 1967), and will briefly illustrate the efforts of the Palestinian Committee for Geographical Names in preserving the original names and the methodology that has been used to accomplish this.