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**IMPLEMENTATION OF RESOLUTIONS AND THE AIMS
AND FUNCTIONS OF UNGEGN**

PROPOSED GUIDANCE FOR UNGEGN

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In the Newsletter of May 1995, under the heading "General Remarks on UNGEGN", attention was drawn to problems which need to be resolved if UNGEGN is to continue to work successfully in the future. UNGEGN has been in existence for almost 30 years and yet there are serious differences in the views of Experts on fundamental issues. The first concerns the very meaning of the words *international standardization*.

The United Nations Group of Experts exists because the Secretary-General and his staff were disturbed at the various ways in which geographical names could be spelled in the Roman alphabet. Therefore the primary reason, and perhaps the sole reason, for the existence of UNGEGN as a UN body is its capacity for achieving uniformity in the writing of geographical names through international standardization. Despite its origins, repeatedly over the past three decades, there have been Experts who maintain that all that is required from UNGEGN is the provision of standardized names for a few maps intended for international use. Clearly, that was not what the Secretary-General and his staff had in mind. On the contrary, they hoped to be given unambiguous communication when geographical names were used. I hope, therefore, Experts will agree on the following definition of international standardization:-

"International standardization means the adoption by the world of a single spelling for each geographical name as far as that is possible. Where two or more names have equal standing as official names, standardization rules will define the circumstances under which each has precedence.

International standardization shall be based on national standardization as was declared in Resolution 4 of the First Conference.

National authorities have sole responsibility for national standardization and for determining which name has precedence over others in those cases where more than one name is in current use locally."

UNGEGN must not be diverted from its goal (the attainment of international standardization) by engaging in discussions which do not contribute to that end.

UNGEGN is a body not qualified to participate in discussions relating to sovereignty or disputes over geographical names arising from questions of sovereignty.

UNGEGN should not be drawn into possible debates on the cultural aspects of geographical names. The following guideline is proposed for consideration as a resolution:-

"The question of the cultural aspects of names is a national matter. UNGEGN will not engage in discussions relating to the cultural aspects of geographical names."

International standardization can be advanced by defining categories of names which are not subject to standardization. The names of continents, oceans and the seas within the oceans can only be standardized within each of the world's languages.

Country names form a special category of geographical names. They are part of everyday communication in each language. From them are derived adjectives and nouns of nationality which are subject to laws of grammar. International standardization is not, therefore, a realizable goal.

The following guideline is proposed for consideration as a resolution:-

"The spelling of the names of (a) regions and geographical features of continental or inter-national extension (b) water areas extending beyond the territorial limits of recognized government and (c) countries are not subject to international standardization except in each of the world's languages."

The following guideline is proposed for consideration as a resolution:-

Onomastics (the study of names and naming) and pure toponymy (the study of place names, their derivation and history) are subjects which are not relevant to the international standardization of geographical names. UNGEGN will not devote its energies to discussion of those subjects."

International standardization means the use of a single spelling of each geographical name. The following guideline is proposed for consideration as a resolution:-

"The approved name of any administrative division of an independent country, or federation of states or of any natural or artificial geographical feature or of any place lying wholly within one country or federation of states, shall be that adopted by the supreme administering authority of that country or federation of states; eg. Uttar Pradesh (not United Provinces):-

but, should a different name be current in conventional usage, it may be given subordinate recognition; eg. Cabo de Hornos (Cape Horn), Moskva (Moscow).

Where any name of the kinds referred to in the preceding paragraph contains a descriptive term, that term shall not be translated; eg. Isola d'Ischia (not Island of Ischia):-

but, where a geographical name stands in isolation and is neither a geographical proper noun nor is attached to such a proper noun, it may be translated; eg. Russian *brod* may be translated into English *ford*.

The names of places and of geographical features in countries which officially use varieties of the Roman alphabet shall be accepted for the purpose of international standardization in their official spelling, including the accents and diacritical marks used in the respective alphabets.

The non-standard Roman letters in the official names of places and geographical features in countries which use extended Roman alphabets may be substituted by Roman letters in accordance with conventions agreed for the respective alphabets (eg. ä for "ə" in Azerbaijani)."