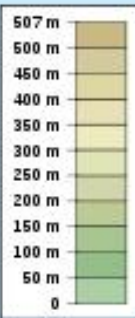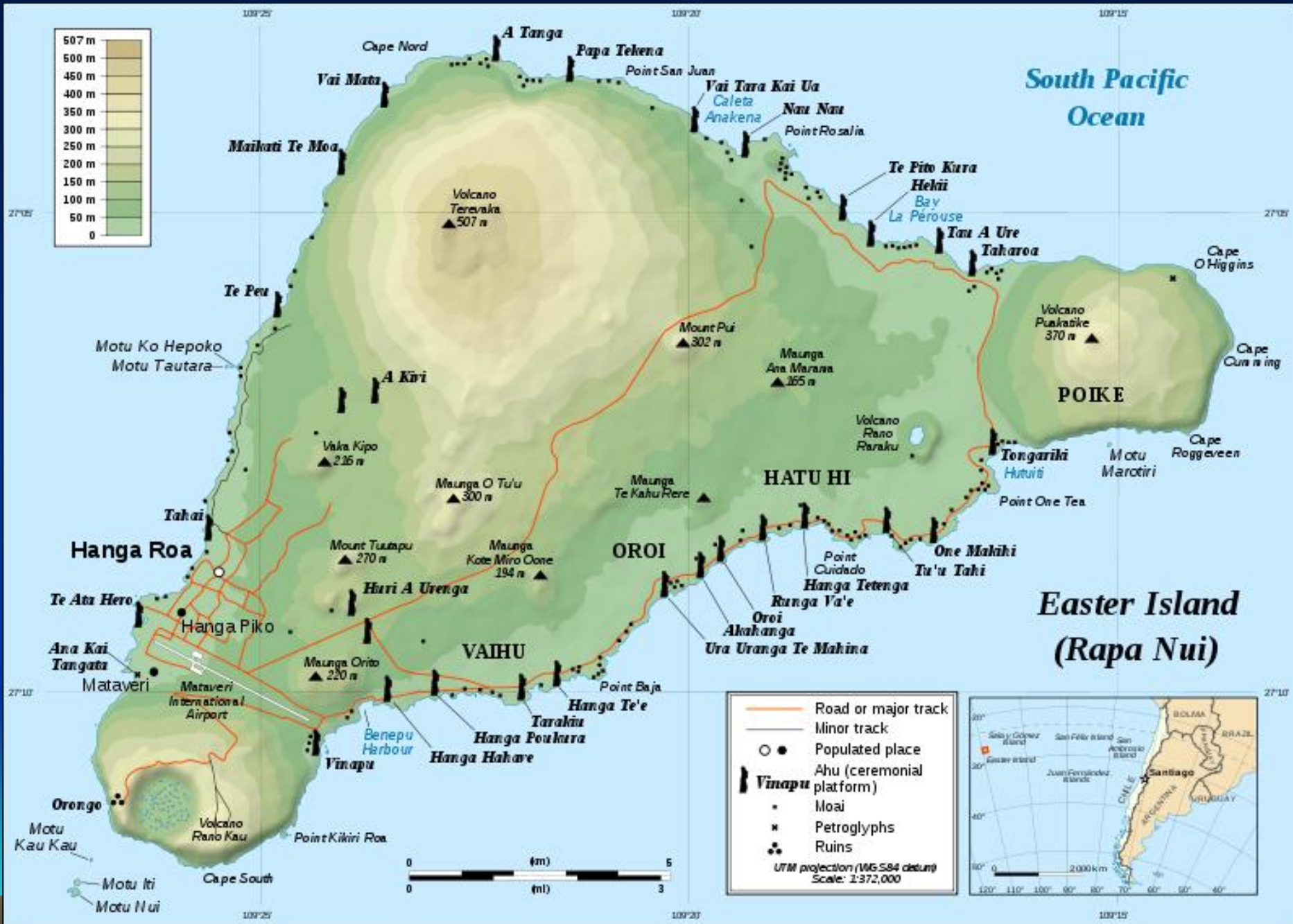2009

# Geographical names – maps, identity and the United Nations

Helen Kerfoot

UNGEGN Chair
(Natural Resources Canada)

ICA, Santiago
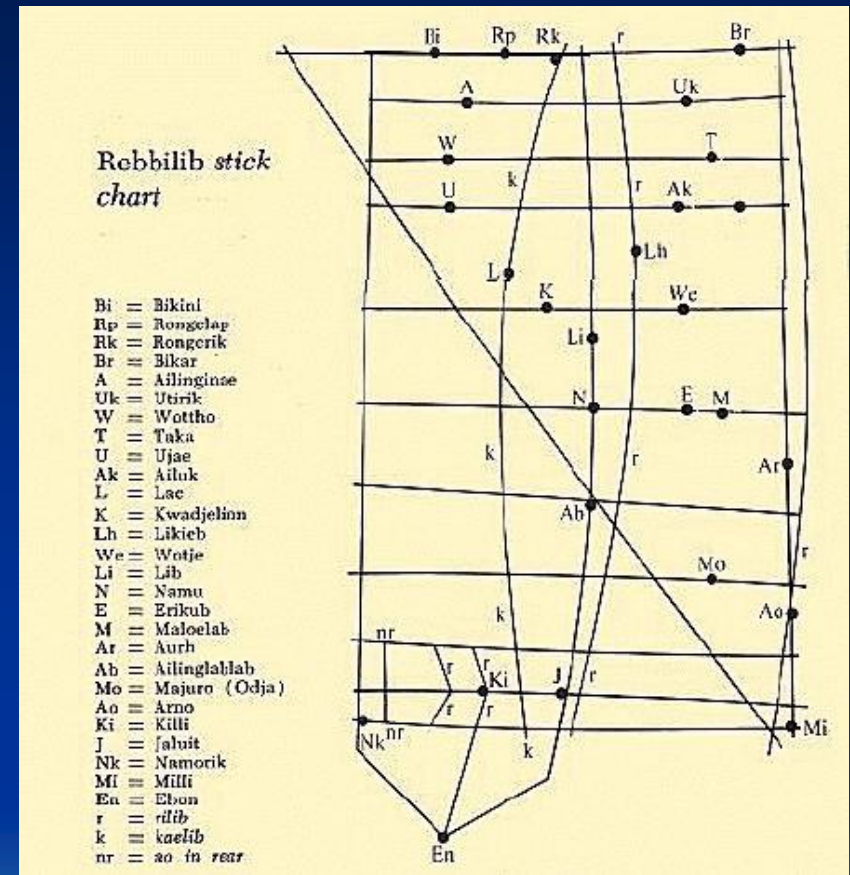
Easter Island (Rapa Nui)

# Easter Island or ............?



- Paasch-Eyland …1722 Dutch Admiral Jakob Roggeveen
  - Paaseiland
- Île de Paques …1756 French La Pérouse
- Isla de Pascua …1770 Spanish ......... (annexed by Chile 1888)

- Te pito te henua .... (Navel of the World)
- Te pito o te kainga a Hau Maka ... (Little piece of land of Hau Maka)
- Mata-ki-te-rangi .... (Eyes that talk to the sky)
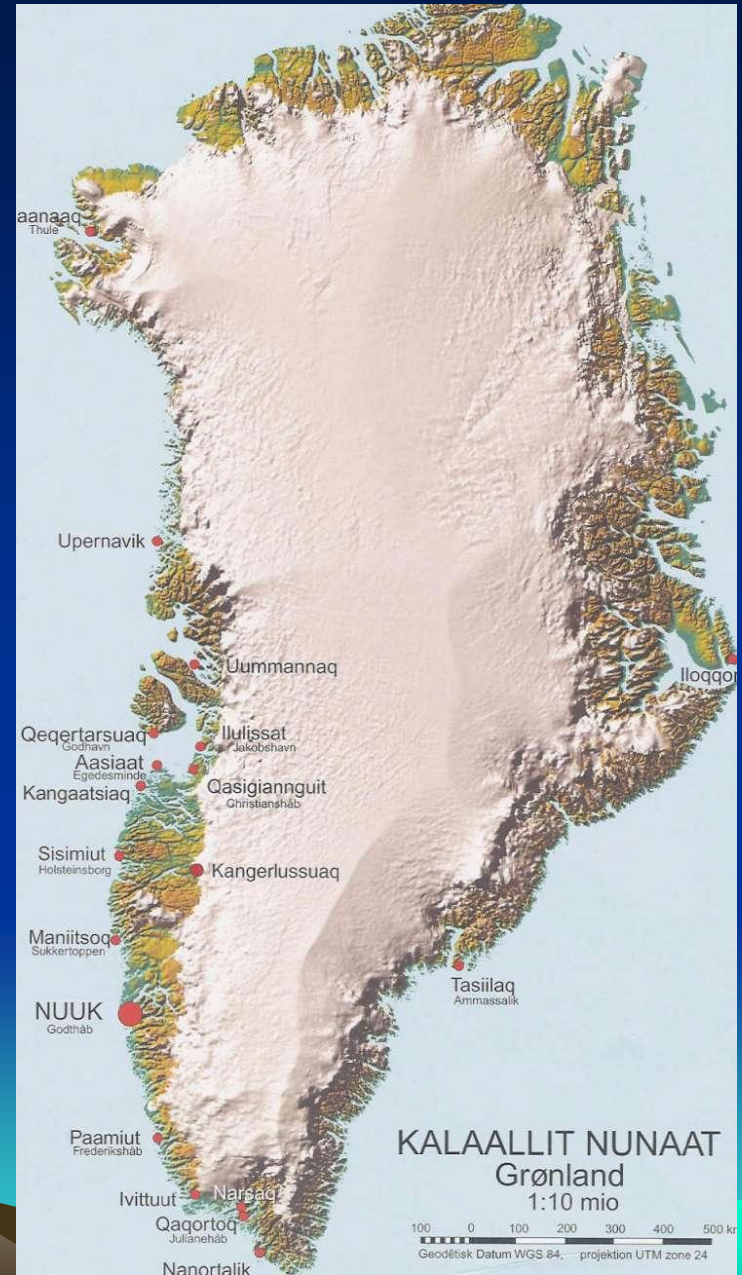- Rapa Nui (Rapanui)

# Maps/charts ... no names





- Stick chart of Marshall Islands
- Chart given to R.L. Stevenson by King Kabua, ruler of the Marshall Is
- Cowrie shells indicate islands

- Documented by Winkler in 1901
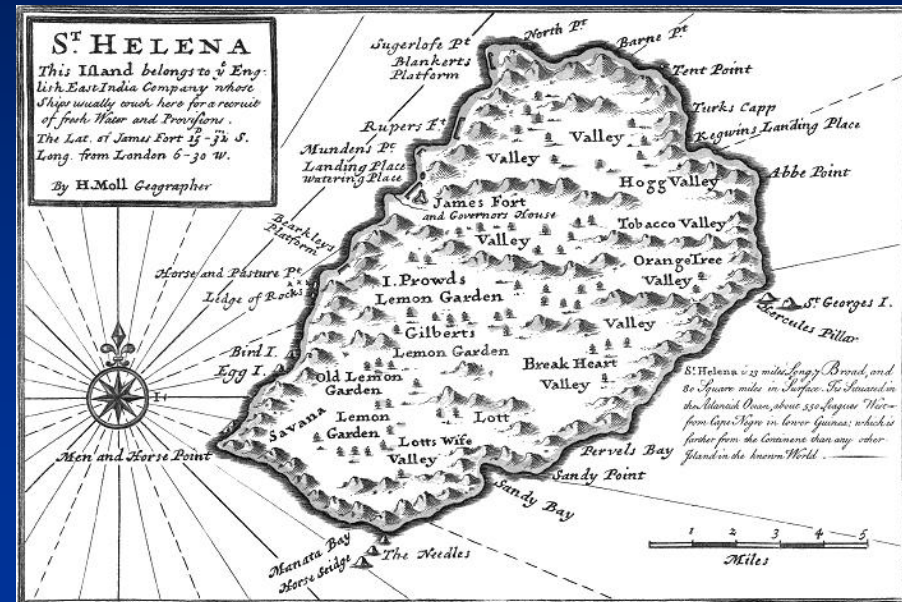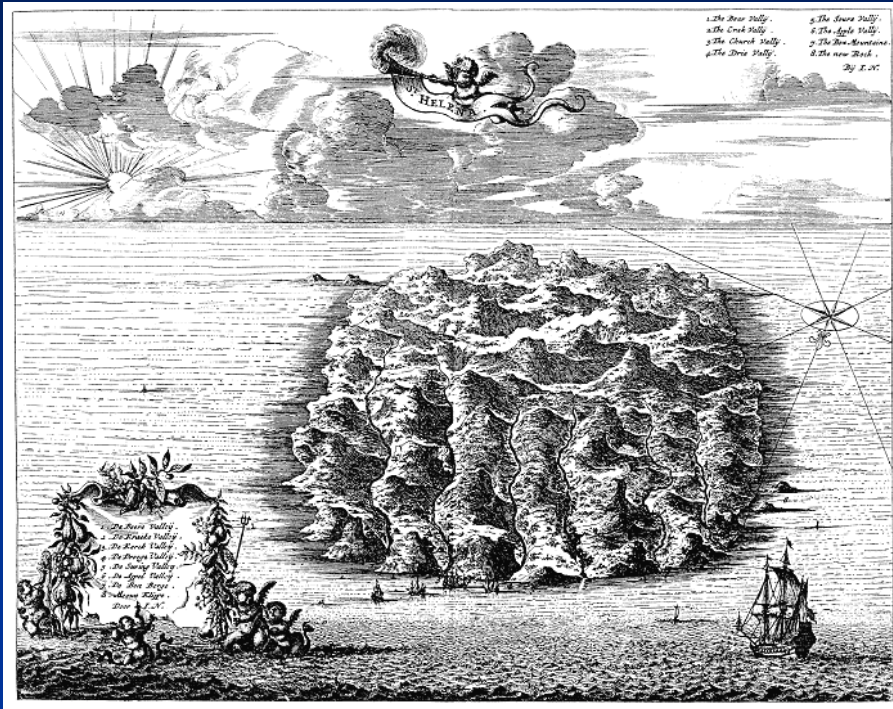- Each island named in David Lewis' *We the Navigators*

- Driftwood 'map' gives tactile reminder of detailed coastline

# Towards inclusion of toponyms





- St. Helena, Moll, 1732

- St. Helena, likely Dutch origin
  - In John Ogilby, 1670
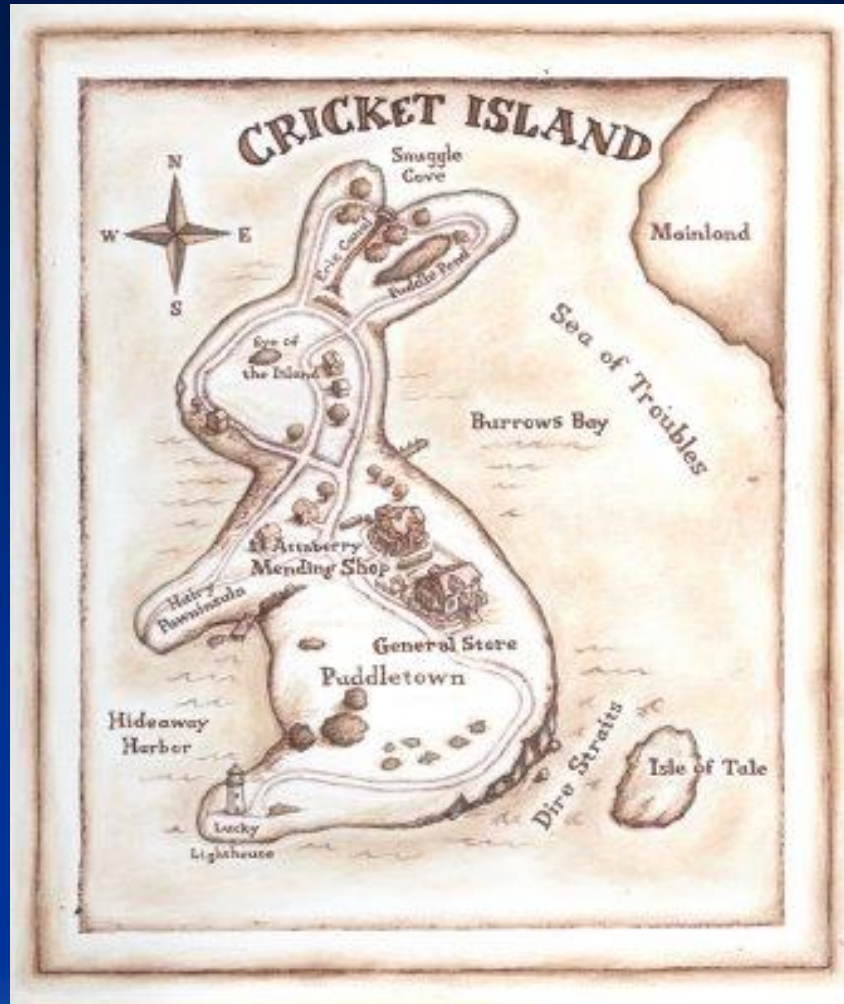
- Even fictional maps are incomplete without names!

# Communication problems – thematic maps, air photos ...



Land use - 2004

Landue pattern
- Agricultural Land
- Degraded Forest
- Dense Forest
- Forest Plantation
- Grass Land
- Horticulture or Plantation
- Land with or without Scrub
- Open Forest
- Village

Joint Pilot Project - RCMRD / MAPS geosystems
CommGIS NAIROBI
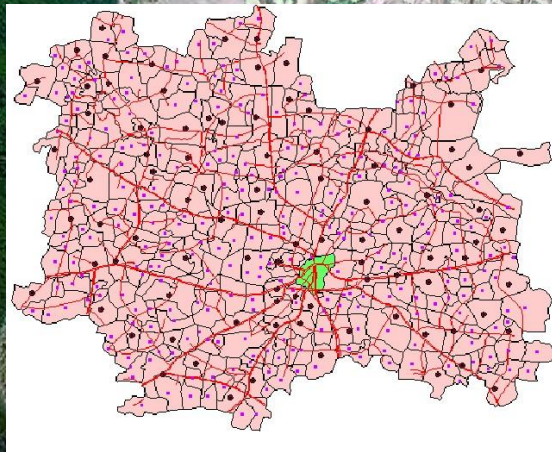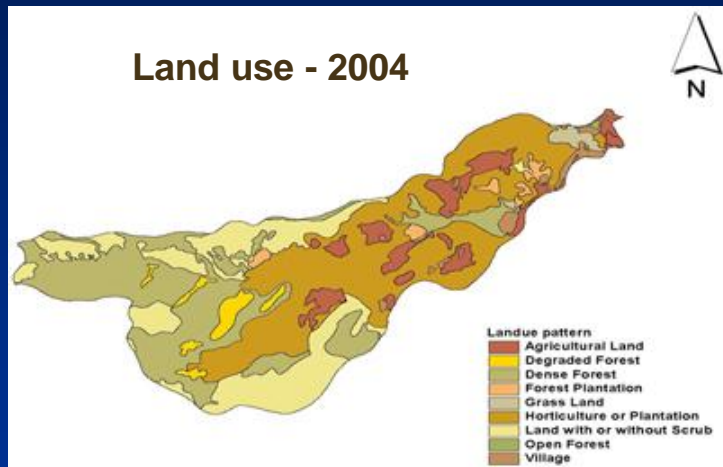
# ... satellite images



Toponyms needed
to identify, describe, analyse
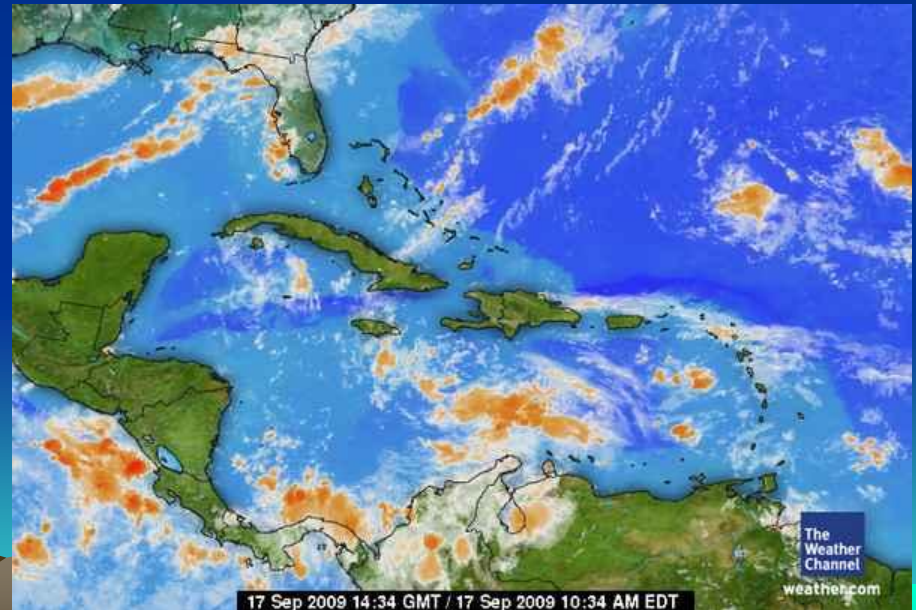
# Names are more than just labels on a map ...

# Names are a connecting point between Man and the Land ...

# Names may change

War and conquest
Boundary changes
Post-colonial period
Use of indigenous names
Changes in romanization systems

........

# Names appear, disappear and re-appear

Names needed!
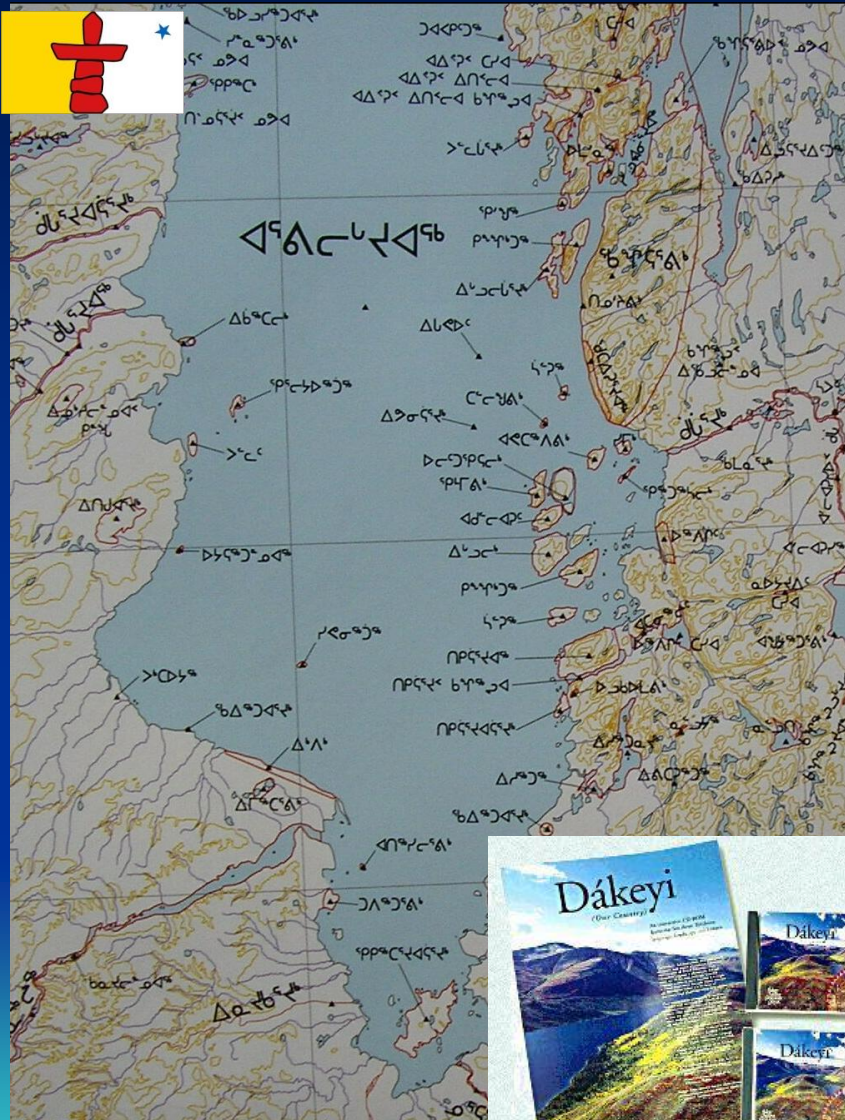


New urban names in China

New man-made islands in Dubai, UAE

# Names carry the hopes and challenges of culture and identity ...



ᐃᓄᑦᑎᑐᑦ ᓄᓇᐃᑦ ᐊᑎᖕᕇᑦᑕ ᑲᑎᕐᓱᑕᐅᓂᖕᒋᑦ
ᓄᓇᕕᒻᒥ (ᑯᐸᐃᒻᒥ, ᑲᓇᑕᒥ)

Inuttitut Nunait Atingitta Katirsutauningit Nunavimi
(Kupaimmi, Kanatami)

*Gazetteer of Inuit Place Names in Nunavik (Quebec, Canada)*

Répertoire toponymique inuit du Nunavik (Québec, Canada)

Kyev Kiev Kyiv Kyyev

Sidney Sydney

Helsinki
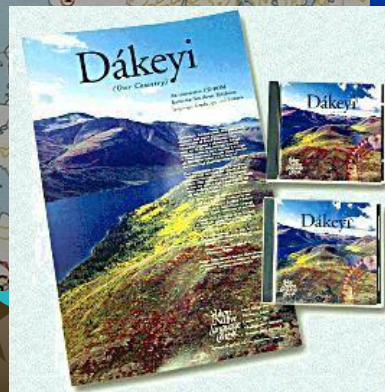
New Zealand Aotearoa

?

Mumbai Bombay

Montréal Montreal

Αθήνα Athens
Athenai Athína

Helsingfors

Cape Town Le Cap

Kaapstad Kapstadt

Uluru / Ayers Rock

Ekapa Kapkaupunki
eKapa

# Misuse of names can cause friction

- Inaccurate references
  - Macedonia ... The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
- Inappropriate use of exonyms
- Inaccurate spelling ... omitting diacritics
  - Montréal; La Coruña
- Not recognizing name changes
  - Pietersburg to Polokwane
- Not recognizing multiple names
  - Helsinki/Helsingfors

# Benefits of standardized names?

**information management**

**humanitarian aid**

**respond to climate change,
world health issues and food provision**

**urban planning**

**infrastructure development**

**tourism promotion**

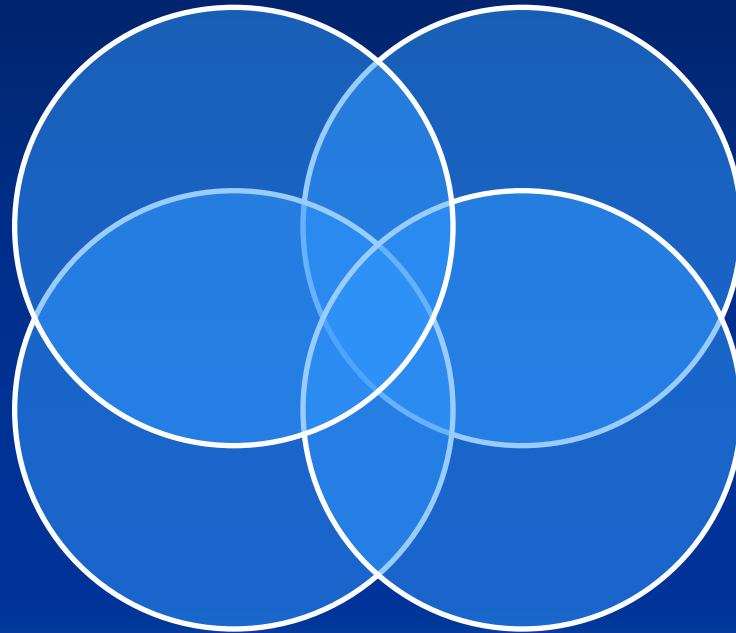**preservation of cultural heritage ….**

# Benefits of standardized names?

**Technical benefits**

**Economic benefits**

**Social benefits**

**Cultural benefits**

# Lack of standardized data …

- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)
  - Earthquake in Pakistan, 2005
    - problem of delays in providing assistance to remote villages
    - difficult to obtain - standardized names, coordinates of villages, gazetteers, population statistics, maps
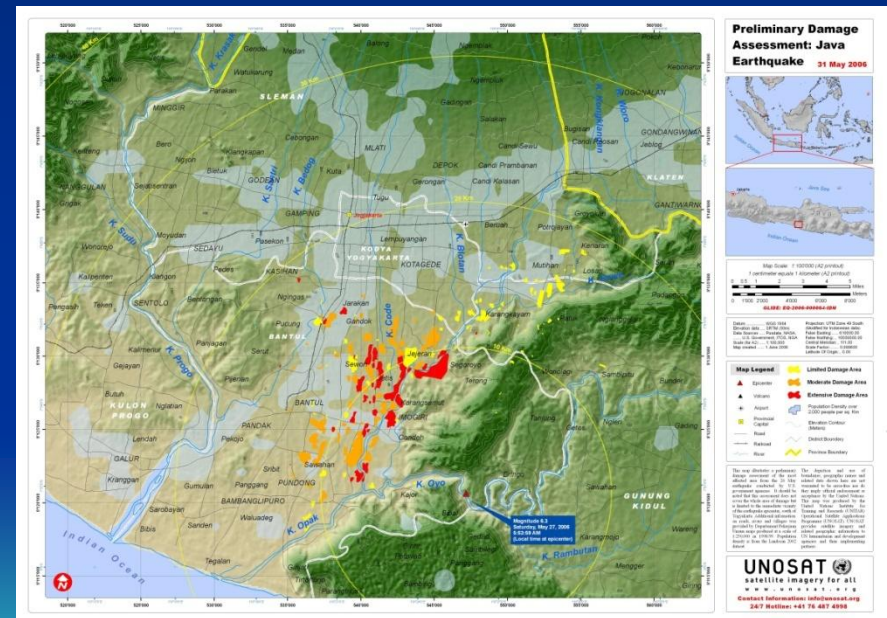


2005 Pakistan Earthquake

# Standardization benefits – UNOCHA

- Java, Indonesia, earthquake, 2006
  - aid progressed rapidly … maps, standardized names integrated into GIS, easily available

- Need for cooperation towards regional/global toponymic databases …

- SE Asia and SW Pacific
  - regional gazetteer and map

# Aim - clarity and avoiding ambiguity

- Correctly recorded names data
  - based on local usage
  - "standardized" - through an authority

- Available and easily accessible

# Authorization of toponyms

- *National mapping/hydrographic authorities*
- Names boards established
  - 1890   United States Board on Geographic Names
  - 1897   Geographic Board of Canada
  - 1910   Denmark
  - 1946   New Zealand, Ireland
  - ..................
  - 2009   Brazil, Afghanistan
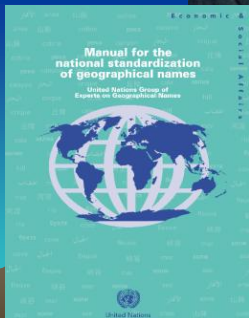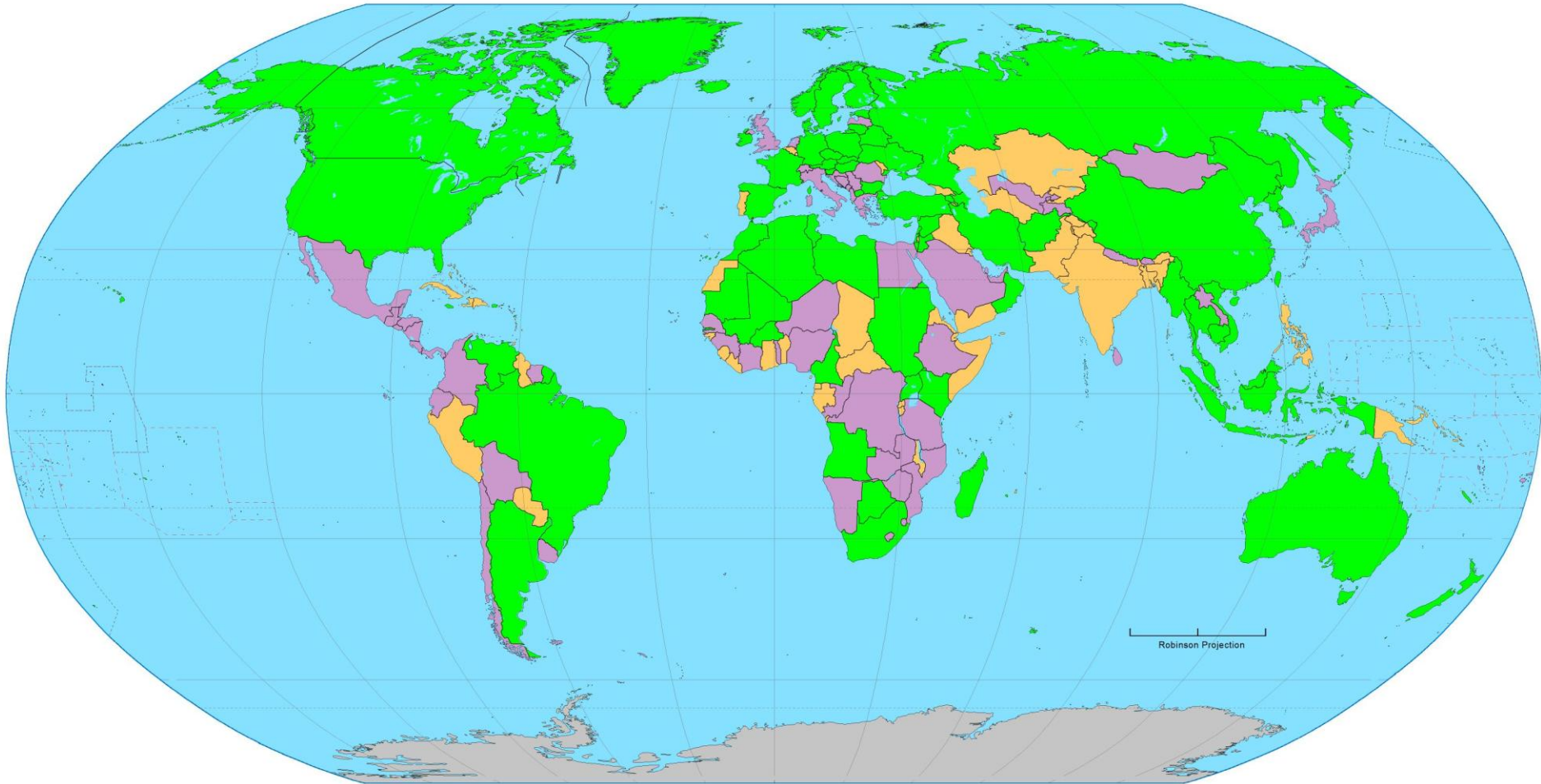  - Now some 40 countries with names authorities

# Names authorities ...

Names discussions:
A.  Mongolia
B.  Canada – advisory committee
C.  Australia – NSW board

# Geographical Names Authorities (September 2009)



Robinson Projection

■ **With national names authorities**    ■ **No national names authorities**    ■ **Status unknown**

# Accessing standardized geographical names data

- Individual countries
  - web-based queries; paper copy gazetteers

- Groups of countries
  - SE Asia/SW Pacific regional gazetteer and map
  - Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso ... CD?
  - Africa Gazetteer – free development software (ECA)
  - Arabic-speaking countries gazetteer (Beirut system)

- Multinational – decentralized
  - EuroGeoNames

- World – UN – selected data
  - UNGEGN multilingual, multiscriptual
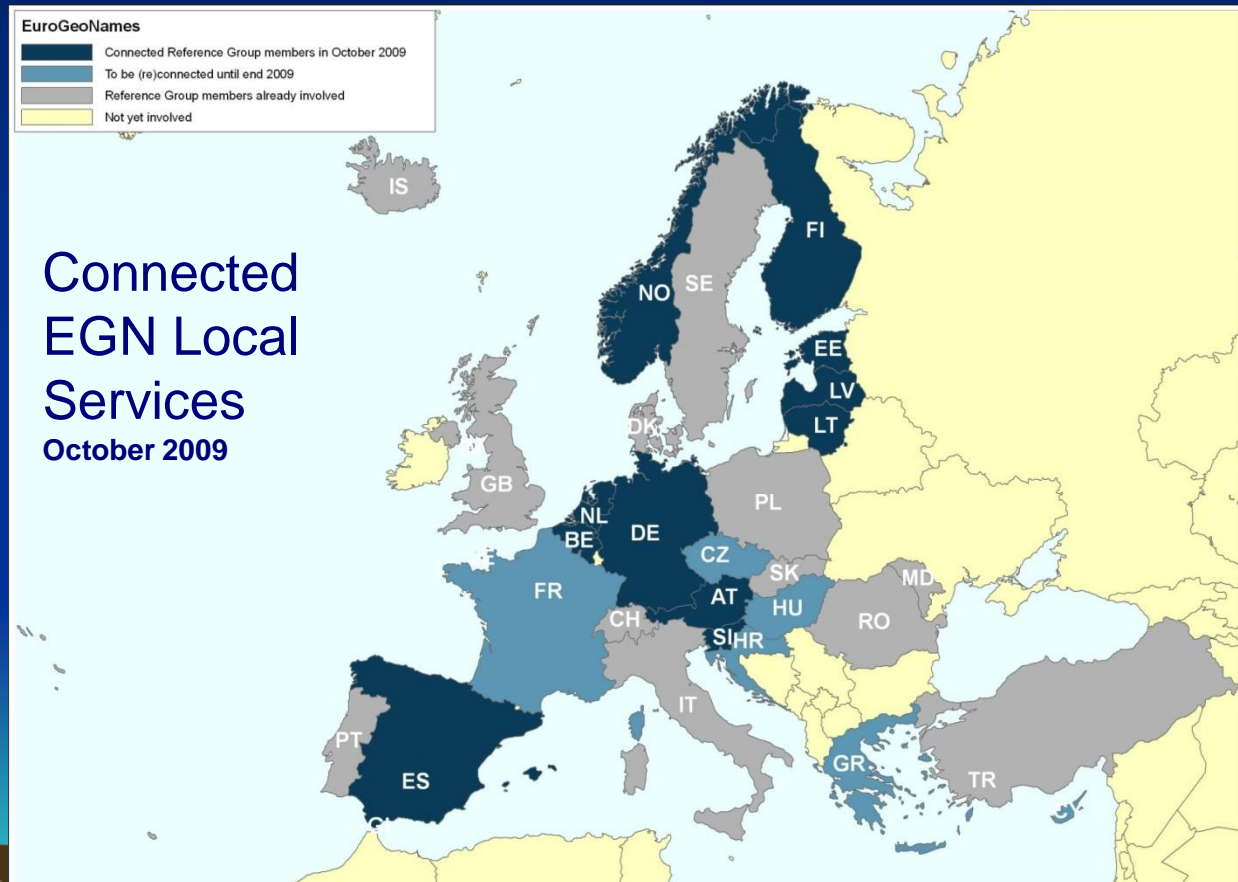
# Project EuroGeoNames (EGN)

European geographical names infrastructure and services based upon the decentralized individually maintained national data bases

## EGN Consortium

**Public sector**

**Academic sector**

**Private sector**

Connected EGN Local Services
**October 2009**

EuroGeoNames
- Connected Reference Group members in October 2009
- To be (re)connected until end 2009
- Reference Group members already involved
- Not yet involved

Bundesamt für Kartographie und Geodäsie

**EGN Central (WFS) Service (public WFS URL):**
*http://www.eurogeonames.com:8080/gateway/gateto/anonymous-public*

# UNGEGN Geonames Database

- Access through UNGEGN web site

- To include names of:
  Countries
  Capital and cities > 100,000

.. original writing system
.. romanized
.. variants (exonyms, name changes)
.. audio for endonyms
.. geo-referenced



Query

Interactive map

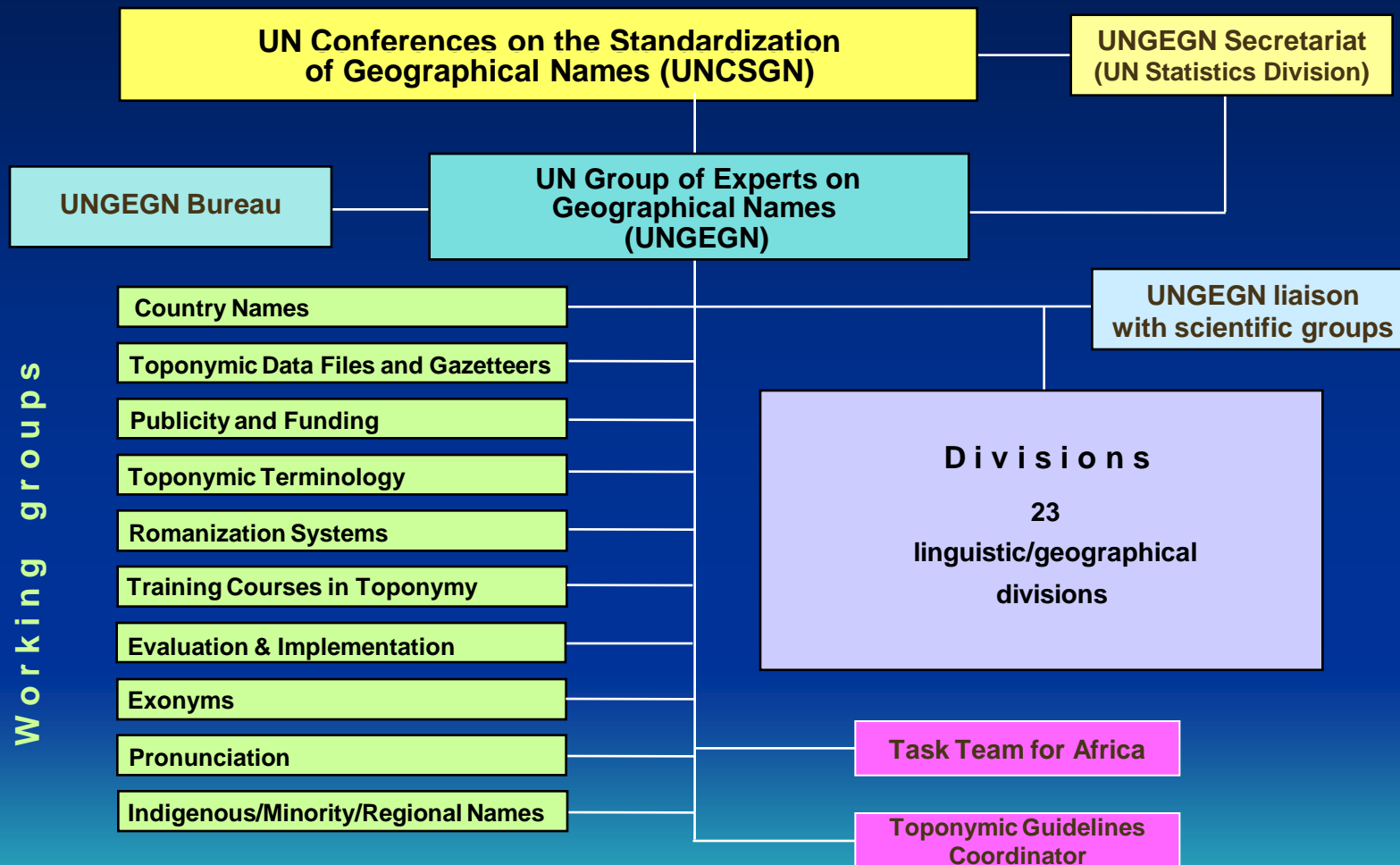Tabular format

# Early days at the UN

- 1948 – UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

- 1955 – First Regional Cartographic Conf. for Asia and Pacific

- 1959 – ECOSOC resolution 715 A (XXVII)

- 1960 – first experts group meeting

- 1967 – First Conference
  on standardization of geographical names

- national standardization
  - basis of international standardization (romanization)
    - resolution I/4 … foundation

2004

# 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)**

**Working groups**

- Country Names
- Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers
- Publicity and Funding
- Toponymic Terminology
- Romanization Systems
- Training Courses in Toponymy
- Evaluation & Implementation
- Exonyms
- Pronunciation
- Indigenous/Minority/Regional Names

**UNGEGN liaison with scientific groups**

**D i v i s i o n s**

**23 linguistic/geographical divisions**

**Task Team for Africa**

**Toponymic Guidelines Coordinator**

# WG – Romanization systems

28 scripts have UN recognition
17 scripts under discussion

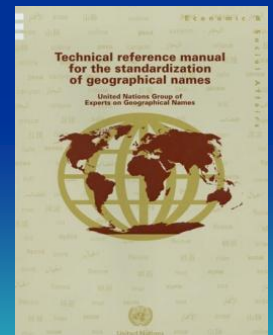see UNGEGN Technical Manual

Convenor: Peeter Päll, Estonia
WG website: http://www.eki.ee/wgrs/

Cooperating with ICANN
-web addresses in non-Roman scripts
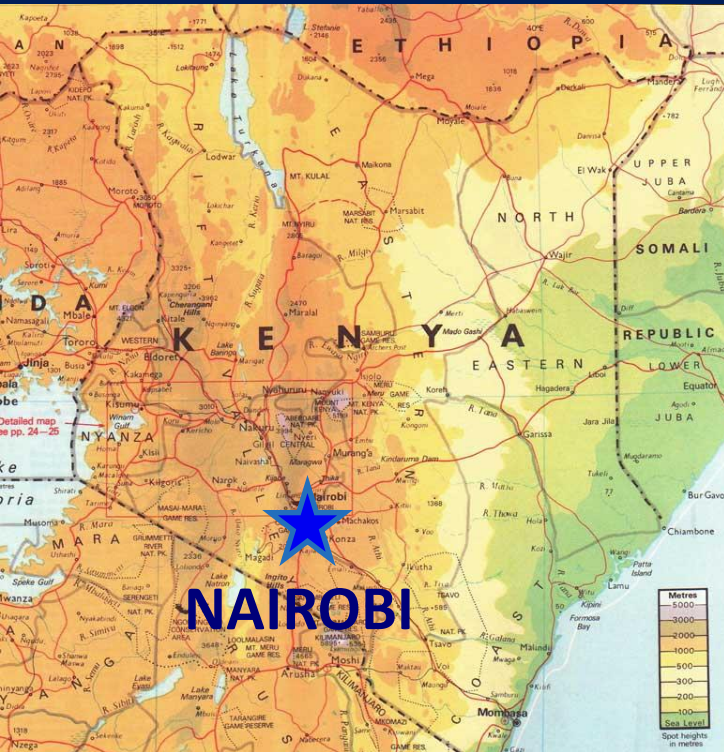
# WG - Training courses in Toponymy

- International courses since 1982
  - in various languages and locations
- Course outlines
  - web site: http://toponymycourses.geog.uu.nl
- For a larger audience ... towards web-based courses
  - Division francophone
    www.toponymiefrancophone.org/DivFranco/Formation/accueil.htm
  - ICA  lazarus.elte.hu/cet      (Convenor: Ferjan Ormeling)

# Building names standardization in Africa

## Low participation

- "Benefits of a country's toponymy not really recognized"
  - Felicia Akenyami, Nigeria

- "Relevance of toponymy not really appreciated"
  - Vibon Ngo, Cameroon

## Since

- Task Team for Africa
  - Convenor, Brahim Atoui, Algeria

- Agenda item during UNGEGN Sessions
  - UNGEGN Nairobi 2009

- Liaison with African organizations ... ECA, AOCRS, etc.

## 2004

- Organize training

- Increase awareness
  - African Union, conferences ...

- ECA – developing database/gazetteer model for Africa

*Results?*
Increased interest in some countries; re-establishing UNGEGN divisions

© 2008 DMapas
© 2008 Tele Atlas
© 2008 Europa Technologies

# Toponymic guidelines for map editors

**Template**

- Languages (official, national, minority)
  - *legal status, spelling and grammar rules; pronunciation; dialects*
- Names authorities
  - *national and provincial; legal aspects*
- Source material
  - *maps, atlases, gazetteers, databases*
- Glossary of words needed to understand maps
- Abbreviations used on maps
- Distinguishing toponyms from other type on maps
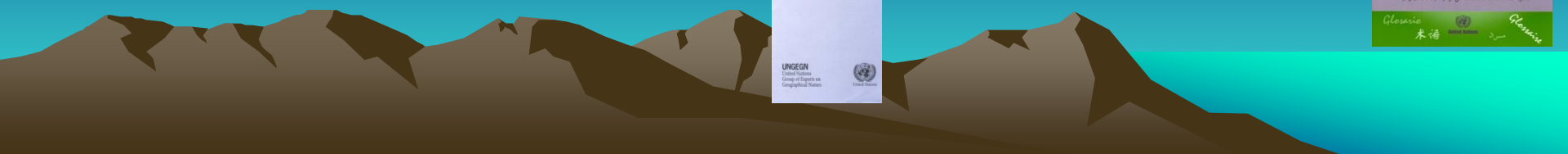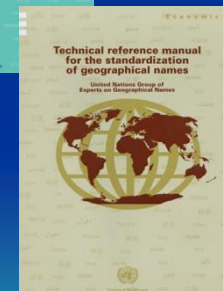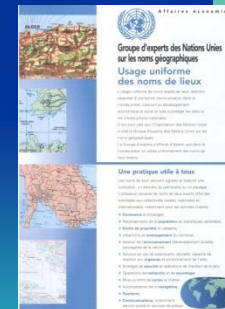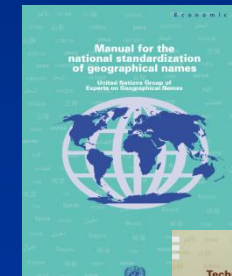- Administrative maps

**Guidelines for 40 countries**

# UNGEGN website . . .

unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/

- Overview … Mandate
- Conferences
- UNGEGN
  - Working groups; divisions
- News and events
- Documents and publications
- Links
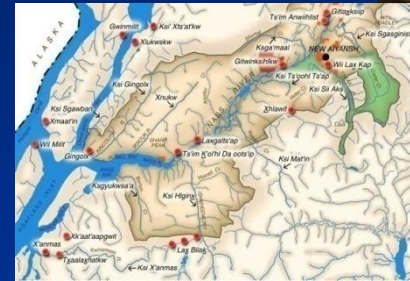  - National authorities
  - National toponymic databases
- Contacts …
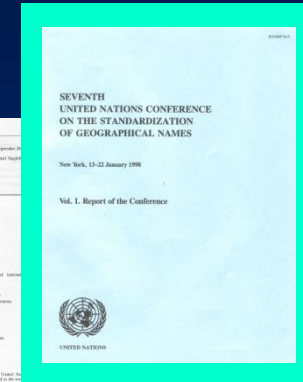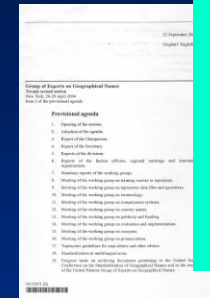
# In concluding …



- ## 50 years of the UN & names

  - ### Work affected by politics, communications, and Internet

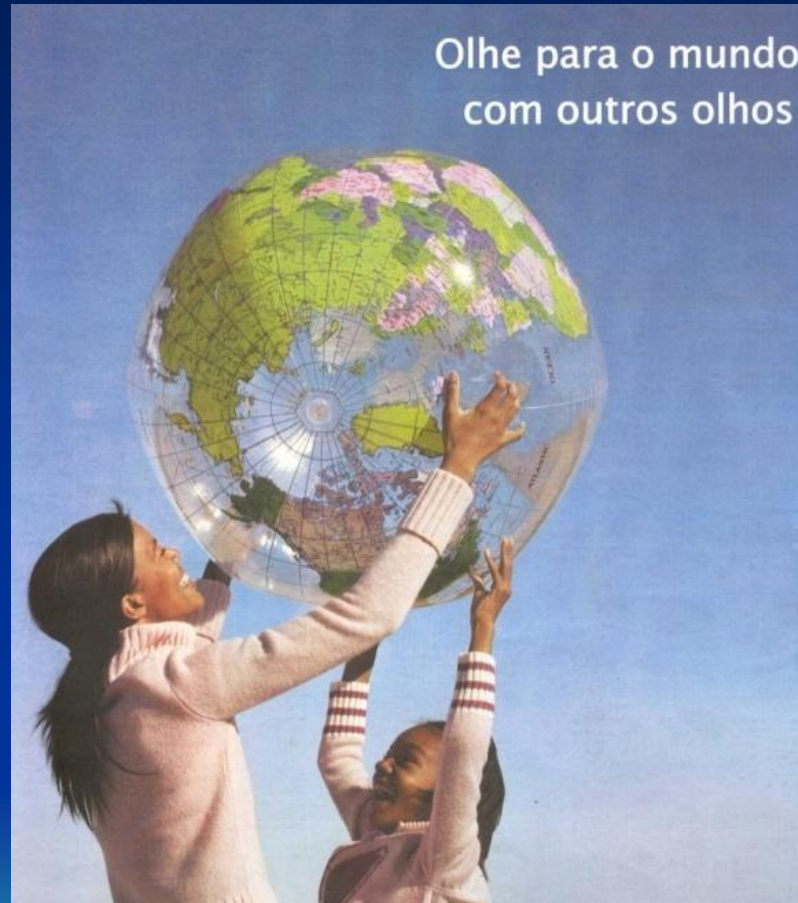  - ### Higher expectations from users and methods changed



- ## Need for accessible standardized names continues

  - ### Names are vital GIS elements in accessing knowledge and preserving our cultures

  - ### Providing benefits for users

    government, science, education, public ...

# Looking to the future …



Mira el mundo con otros ojos

See the world through the eyes of others