

Notes
Inaugural Meeting of UNGEGN Bureau and Division Chairs
Microsoft Teams Meeting
Friday 19 November 2021
7:00 am

Agenda

1. Welcome and opening remarks
 - i. Chair UNGEGN– Pierre Jaillard
 - ii. Director of UNSD-Stefan Schweinfest
2. The Importance of Divisions in the UNGEGN framework– Pierre Jaillard
3. Examples of operations and activities of Divisions
 - i. Asia South East, Mohamad Arief Syafii, Indonesia
 - ii. Norden, Ingvil Nordland, Norway
 - iii. Romano-Hellenic, Andrea Cantile, Italy
4. Open discussion
 - i. Introductory statement -Pierre Jaillard
 - ii. Guidance required to assist Divisions
5. Next steps and closing remarks

The meeting began at 7:02 am

1. Welcome and opening remarks

1. Pierre Jaillard, Chair of UNGEGN, opened the meeting and representatives of the linguistic/geographical divisions were invited to introduce themselves and their divisions. The list of the 14 divisional representatives who attended is available in the appendix. The members of the Bureau were next introduced. Pierre extended thanks to the UNGEGN Secretariat for preparing and organizing the meeting. The Secretariat was also introduced.

2. The Chair shared that the meeting was being convened for first time in accordance with the decision from the last UNGEGN session. Reference was made to Rule 47 of the Rules of Procedure that outlines the role of divisions. The main objectives of the meeting were to strengthen cooperation between the bureau and the divisions and across divisions and also discuss the rhythm of future meetings.

3. Director of UNSD-Stefan Schweinfest gave opening remarks. He introduced the Secretariat – Cecille and Vilma and said a few words about the work he has done over 20 years in support of UNGEGN. He shared that he was impressed by the UNGEGN professional community, who works together and has an impressive history going back to the 1950. He also shared that what the UN does best, is to connect people, in this case experts who share the concern of improving the standardization of geographical names, and the meeting participants present proved this to be true. Further he noted that over years UNGEGN had reformed itself, modified its architecture, meeting schedule and is currently focused on implementing a Strategic Plan and Programme of work – UNGEGN 2.0. The Director UNSD shared that



the Divisions were important in carrying the work forward, as representatives of divisions contribute to global work by bringing together countries that share geography, language and culture and work together with professionalism, solidarity, exchanging experiences and sharing good practices. He also noted that it was important to revive the divisional structure – 24 divisions covering the globe, as this would help with the implementation of the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work. The Director UNSD further noted that other bigger discussions needed to happen on how geographical names contribute to developmental topics such as the Sustainable Development Agenda, climate change, the environment, inclusion and inequality and how names contribute to the historical dimension of cultural heritage. He concluded noting that this is an exciting area of work and an opportune moment for UNGEGN's Divisions to come together, as the UN works best when peoples across the world come together and share their good and bad experiences, (that others do not have to repeat.)

2. The Importance of Divisions in the UNGEGN framework– Pierre Jaillard

4. The Chair thanked Stefan Schweinfest for his inspiring words and then spoke on ensuring the importance of the divisions and the decision from the second session to convene regular divisional meetings. He further stated that standardization of names relies on the work done at the national level. Further, he shared clauses six to eight from Section XIV, rule 47 of the Rules of Procedure. They are as follows:

6. *The Division Chair and Vice-Chair shall stimulate activities in the standardization of geographical names within their division by all appropriate means, such as correspondence with national bodies on the standardization of geographical names and national geospatial agencies, and organization of meetings of the division members.*
7. *The Division Chair shall be responsible for ensuring that the work of the Group and its potential for technical assistance are brought to the attention of the individual States that are members of the division concerned and for reporting to the Group any special problems in the division.*
8. *To discuss technical and procedural matters, a division may organize meetings to be held in parallel with sessions of the Group and meetings of any body of its organizational structure, or at any other appropriate time.*

5. The Chair also noted that the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work provides actions for divisions and working groups to develop ideas and tasks and to work together. The Division's work should focus on promoting the value of geographical names standardization, bolstering national contribution, in particular to SDG target 11.4 - protect and safeguard cultural and heritage and language, in addition to fostering standardization at national levels in accordance with UNGEGN's principles, endorsing romanization systems and enhancing the dissemination of standardized geographical names. He concluded by noting that it is recognized that some Divisions are not active and hoped that following good practices will boost everyone.

3. Examples of operations and activities of Divisions

6. **Asia Southeast Division** - Ade K Mulyana represented Mohamad Arief Syafii, Indonesia, Chair of Asia Southeast Division. He gave an overview of his division and their activities. There are 12 countries in this division. The members have been actively participating in UNGEGN sessions, 8 of 12 counties participated in 2019/1st UNGEGN session. The divisional meeting in 2020 was attended by 6 of 12 members. The ninth divisional meeting will be held in November 2022. BIG Indonesia serves as the secretariat for the division.



7. In 2019 at the seventh divisional meeting in New York the members approved their 2019-2022 work plan, which had four major activities. They were 1) the creation of a regional database and gazetteer, 2) convene annual divisional meetings, 3) construct a map of divisional members and 4) build a database on generic terms from member countries. For example, some countries have the same root of languages. Members were asked to submit data to construct the regional map and generic terms. Other activities performed were updating contact information for member countries and maintaining the division's website. The new website was constructed in a collaborative form and members countries are encouraged to participate in UNGEGN meetings. The most recent activity was held two months ago. This was a webinar on "Recognizing Generic Terms in Geographical Names from Local Languages" with the objective to share knowledge between toponymic and local language. The webinar was attended by more than 150 persons, and it was streamed on YouTube. Prof Ormeling and representatives from the Philippines and Indonesia were main speakers.

8. Due to the pandemic some activities were not conducted such as the international training course which was postponed several times. The divisional secretariat is having a hard time in maintaining contact information for some countries. Updated contact is available for 10 of 12 countries. The division has been working with the UNGEGN Secretariat to trace countries. Other challenges are the execution of the workplan which includes compiling the generic terms database, all countries have not submitted the required data.

9. **Norden Division-** Ingvil Nordland, Norway has been chairing the division since 2017. She showed a map of the division's countries and the list of Bureau members. Success factor of the division she highlighted was collaboration through the Nordic Council, which was established in 1952. It has created a common identify and a strong onomastic community. Most of the division's members work with geographical names daily and are trained onomasticians which is strong technical support. There is also a strong tradition of collaboration between onomasticians/academia and national mapping agencies. Most Nordic countries established national names authorities early. Also, a number of countries have legislation that safeguards names as cultural heritage. Language and places names are often subject for public debate and this creates interest and public engagement – sometimes negative.

10. The main challenge identified was an outdated divisional website and a sustainable solution is needed, that is not dependent on individual institutions. Work done is dependent on the voluntarism of members and this makes it challenging to have stable activities between sessions. There is a need to recruit members from the technical side, as most are from the onomastic side and also from the Sami areas to improve standardization on Sami names which makes up a large part of the Division.

11. Romano-Hellenic Division - Andrea Cantile, Italy thanked the Chair and secretariat for the invitation to contribute to the meeting. The division was created in 1972 as a division of Romance languages. The division consists of 16 countries and meets on the occasion of the UNGEGN session and organizes symposia on relevant topics on standardization.

12. Maintenance of membership is problematic. Eight of 16 countries generally participate in events. Regarding support of standardization initiatives, Italy has started to collaborate with mapping agencies, and also for the first time with some administrative regions to expand toponymic standardization processes. This exercise will include place names not yet included in the national database, also correct the treatment of names and spread the importance of toponymy according to UN recommendations. Participating in UNGEGN stimulates countries to prepare national reports for submission to UNGEGN sessions. The countries agree to organize activities, for example the choice of topics to be discussed and



the choice of place to hold the meetings. In 2021 a scientific symposium was conducted in Napoli, in hybrid mode which had a satisfactory outcome.

13. With regards to participation in UNGEGN working groups and task teams the focus has been on awareness raising and in recent years the Division has had good relations with the working groups on Exonyms and working group on Cultural Heritage. Since 2015, three symposiums have been organized and another scientific meeting is being planned.

14. For knowledge transfer, a series of initiatives have started, they are intensive toponymy course for provincial, municipal and regional technicians involved in toponymy. Similar activities are being planned in cooperation with the Italian Association of Geography Teachers, for training Geography teachers. It was not possible to host the course this year because of the pandemic.

4. Open discussion, Addressing Divisional Challenges

15. Pierre Jaillard opened the discussion segment of the meeting and shared a list of challenges submitted by the Divisions, to be used to generate discussion. He noted that two topics were to be discussed, i) addressing divisional challenges and ii) deciding on the frequency and plans for next divisional meetings.

16. Pacific South West– the Co-chairs, Australia and New Zealand have been actively engaged, and terms of reference and other topical matters have been discussed. The division was established in 2012, and there have been challenges reaching appropriate representatives within governments. The Co-chairs have been trying to work through Ministries of Foreign Affairs to engage Member State representatives. With regards to Item four, regulations to govern divisional operations, it is acknowledged that there are resolutions that support divisional operations, however it is recommended that guiding and governing methodologies and requirements be changed to simply Terms of Reference, which is softer than regulations. Some divisions are not active and the objective is to encourage their participation.

17. South Africa, Khensanii Maluleke, Chair of the Geographical Names Council, also the Chair of the Dutch and German speaking division addressed the question of promotion of minority groups and minority geographical names. Looking at the Division, South Africa achieved liberation two decades ago and a lot of names were named during colonial rule. As processes unfolds the interest of minority groups are being eroded, when there is a need to affirm the cultural heritage for the majority of peoples. Further, it becomes a challenge regarding how resolutions address groups that were previously oppressed, to start having cultural expression as names as symbols.

18. The Chair responded noting that it is an important topic, and it would be good to have exchanges with the Working Group on Cultural heritage.

19. Pacific South West, Wendy Shaw, New Zealand, also responded. She shared that the challenge of using place names and other icons to help with restoring cultural heritage is an important concept, however many are still grappling with the concept. With restoring and changing names, it is important to bring the whole community on the journey, so that the new names do not cause further division but unifies; enduring and robust process must ensure this. The public with lots of languages want to have opportunity to have their say and consultation is very important. She expressed desire to have further conversations with south Africa directly on the issue.



20. Dutch and German speaking division, Khensanii Maluleke, South Africa – in response to Ms. Shaw’s statement, brought to the attention of the meeting that his country has the legal instrument in place to address the challenge, the 1998 South African Act. He further noted that interacting with communities and reasons for objection are not in line with the legal provision of the Act such that it becomes a challenge. The legislation makes serious provision for reasonable consensus for consultation, there is a whole process for effecting names changes. The names of natural features such as mountains and rivers are used to promote language of a particular area.

21. The Chair noted that there was a need to have dialogue between the UNGEGN secretariat and countries to identify their experts to maintain divisional contacts.

22. Portuguese speaking division Co-chair, Ana Cristina Resende shared that her division has similar problems of identifying country members. They have been able to contact three out of a total of nine members. The UNGEGN secretariat has been helpful, however they were still struggling with the issue. She also shared that the division has begun to collect information about three countries and has also created a divisional website. Additional issues identified were, the need for training of professionals, especially for divisions countries in Africa and increasing attendance at UNGEGN sessions. She noted that should sessions be convened in hybrid form it would be easier to participate and asked if a hybrid meeting was being considered for 2023.

23. Asia South East, Ade K Mulyana of Indonesia, shared that the UNGEGN Secretariat had assisted with identifying members for Thailand and contact is now needed for only one member in the division. Another strategy used to gain contact information was visiting websites and contacting persons from national mapping agencies whom they met at previous UNGEGN meetings.

24. Portuguese speaking division Co-chair, Ana Cristina Resende shared that she wanted to identify ways to attract Member State representatives to participate in her division’s activities. She noted that countries would express an initial interest however their participation would wane. In addition, she shared that the division did have problems maintaining their web site and would welcome help from UNGEGN with the website.

25. Dutch and German speaking division, Khensanii Maluleke of South Africa respond to challenge 11, review of UNGEGN publications. He informed that given skills that exist within the division they had made provision to help to review UNGEGN’s publications – work on the review and draft, edit and publish by 2023. This activity is to be discussed with the UNGEGN Secretariat.

26. On the issue of divisional websites, the Chair asked the Secretariat if it would be possible to develop a common framework to help divisions to have a technical resolution to managing and maintaining their websites.

27. Africa Central, Michel Simeu-Kamdem of Cameroon commented on issue number 5/10, research and partnership with universities. He supported increased co-operation with universities, as within his university topics are annually given to students conducting research, and this is an opportunity to have topics on geographical names. He currently has six students conducting research on place names and it would be possible to increase the number of students doing research.



28. Norden Division, Ingvil Nordland of Norway commented on issue number six, maintenance of websites. She reiterated that their division would welcome the UNGEGN Secretariat's assistance. She also shared a suggestion offered by Peder in their divisional submission to the UNGEGN Secretariat. The Working Group on Geographical Names Data Management has created up a functional and sustainable wiki to manage the groups work. The working group's chair, Pier Giorgio would be prepared to give divisional representatives advise as a practical way forward to maintain similar Wiki's for their divisions.

29. Asia South East, Ade K Mulyana of Indonesia also commented on issue number six, sharing that their division also had the same problem. The division has constructed a collaborative platform, and each country would be asked to contribute to the maintenance. He informed that the shared maintenance of the website and database was a trial exercise and will be evaluated to see how successful the arrangement works.

30. The Chair thanked the divisional representatives for the discussions and recommendations. He noted that the five challenges which were discussed could be considered to be priorities for discussion at future meetings. The five priorities are:

- i. Identification of Divisional members, maintenance of their contacts and employing strategies to retain their participation.
- ii. Support the revision of UNGEGN publications
- iii. Identify strategies to support the maintenance of Divisional websites
- iv. Strengthening research and partnerships with universities
- v. Preparation of terms of reference/guidelines for the management of Divisions

31. Latin American Division, Muñoz Goncen Enrique of Mexico, shared in the chat that in order to address the challenge of improving communication and engagement among countries of a division strategic pathways similar to those inspired by the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework should be established.

5. Next steps and closing remarks

32. The following decisions were made:

- a. Two meetings are to be held each year, one in the first quarter and the second in the fourth quarter of 2022.
- b. At the next Divisional meeting the topics to be addressed will be two to three of the five priorities identified and also task 3-iii-7 of the UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work, which is to *review the function and operation of Bureau, Working Groups and Divisions and consider any change in the organizational structure of UNGEGN.*
- c. Each divisional meeting will be for a maximum of two hours.

33. The Chair thanked everyone for their attention and for interesting and inspiring discussions and encouraged participants to follow-up on the decisions made.



APPENDIX

Meeting Participants

	Member Name	Position	Linguistic/Geographical Divisions	Country
1	Michel Simeu-Kamdem	Chair	Africa Central	Cameroon
2	Sungjae Choo	Vice Chair UNGEGN	Asia East (other than China)	Republic of Korea
3	Hiroshi TANABE	Chair	Asia East (other than China)	Japan
4	Ade K Mulyana	(for Chair)	Asia South East	Indonesia
5	Maciej Zych	Chair	Baltic	Poland
6	Rita Viliuvenė	Vice Chair	Baltic	Lithuania
7	Khensanii Maluleke,	Chair	Dutch and German Speaking	South Africa
8	Irena Svehlova	Chair	East Central and South East	Czechia
9	Šárka H.		East Central and South East	Czechia
10	Pierre Jaillard	Chair UNGEGN	French Speaking	France
11	Elisabeth Calvarin	Vice Chair	French Speaking	France
12	Jahuey Mario Angel	Collaborator	Latin American	Mexico
13	Munoz Goncen Enrique	Chair	Latin American	Mexico
14	Ingvil Nordland	Co-Chair	Norden	Norway
15	Emily Diana Lethbridge	Co-Chair	Norden	Iceland
16	Susan Birtles	Vice Chair UNGEGN,	Pacific South West	Australia
17	Wendy Shaw	Rapporteur UNGEGN	Pacific South West	New Zealand
18	Jose Mahumane	Chair	Portuguese	Mozambique
19	Ana Cristina Resende	Vice Chair	Portuguese	Brazil
20	Andrea Cantile	Chair	Romano- Hellenic	Italy
21	Catherine Cheetham	Chair	United Kingdom	United Kingdom
22	Glenn A Guempel	Chair	USA/Canada	United States
23	Trent Palmer	Rapporteur UNGEGN	USA/Canada	United States
24	Stefan Schweinfest	Director, UNSD		
25	Vilma Frani	UNGEGN Secretariat		
26	Cecille Blake	UNGEGN Secretariat		

