

RESOLUTIONS AND DECISIONS OF UNGEGN

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Resolutions and the subjects they address

The United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names were held every five years between 1967 and 2017, since which time they have been amalgamated with UNGEGN Sessions that now take place every two years. Resolutions on technical issues from the eleven Conferences continue to be recognized and implemented, but from 2019 decisions are put forward and approved in plenary sessions of UNGEGN for endorsement by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).



Photo: UNGEGN

Substantive resolutions on the subject of geographical names cover a range of associated topics, which link to the technical, economic, social and cultural benefits of national standardization. In general, the resolutions provide guidelines and frameworks for national and regional activity and action, relating to:

- National names authorities
- Geographical names databases
- Gazetteers – paper and digital
- Training courses in toponymy
- Romanization systems
- Country names
- Terminology
- Pronunciation
- Exonyms
- Toponymic guidelines
- Features beyond a single sovereignty
- Promoting the use of indigenous, minority and regional language group geographical names
- Geographical names as cultural heritage
- Such issues as commemorative naming, commercialization of geographical names, etc.

Some notable resolutions

One of the most quoted resolutions is no. 4 from the First Conference (I/4), which addressed in detail the basic information about national standardization through development of national names authorities, preserving name records and distributing this information worldwide. Although technology has developed dramatically over more than 50 years since the first conference in 1967, the concept of recognizing local usage of names, authorizing their spelling and application, and distributing the data, are still valid today. These principles have been reinforced in various resolutions over the years.

To move from national standardization of geographical names to their standard use internationally the conversion between writing systems is all important. So far most of this work has focused on conversion to the Roman alphabet. Resolutions address general aspects of romanization as well as single scientific systems of romanization for 30 scripts.

Today, world need for spatially referenced data is growing to address issues of climate change, carbon monitoring, disaster response, and so on. The role of standardized geographical names in spatial data information management is underlined in resolutions, such as VIII/6 (2002), which recommended that standardized geographical names data be included in the design, development and implementation of national and regional spatial data infrastructures, and VIII/7 (2002), which recommended that UNGEGN promote the development of international toponymic data exchange standards. This approach actively contributes to the General Assembly Resolution 70/1 entitled “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.



Photo: David Munro

Cultural heritage aspects of geographical names have not been forgotten. Fieldwork treatment of toponyms, multilingual situations, social and cultural benefits of standardization, exonyms, and indigenous, minority and regional language group names have all been the subject of Conference resolutions. Resolution VIII/9 (2002) and resolution IX/4 (2007) recognized the significance of geographical names to a nation’s cultural heritage, urged promotion of a greater public understanding of names and identity, and made links to the conventions of UNESCO. Resolution X/3 (2012) recommended a list of criteria to establish and evaluate the nature of geographical names as cultural heritage.

Decisions from UNGEGN sessions since 2019

The leading topic of recommendations from the first two sessions of the “new” UNGEGN was the development and adoption of a strategic plan and programme of work for UNGEGN. This document, now approved, will function as basic working guidelines for UNGEGN and its sub-groups from 2021 to 2029. Other substantive decisions included investigation of the principles and methodology of writing geographical names in unwritten languages, and consideration of the connections between geographical names and the environment.

Availability of the texts and database of resolutions (1967-2017) and recommendations (2019-) (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/resolutions>)

A compendium of all resolutions in thematic groups has been compiled and is available in Arabic, English, French, Spanish, Korean and Portuguese on the UNGEGN website. The public can also make word or thematic searches of the resolutions and recommendations on a database: the texts are available in Arabic, English, French, Spanish and Korean.