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**United Nations Group of Experts On
Geographical Names
2019 session**

New York, 29 April – 3 May 2019

Agenda item 10 of the provisional agenda *

Activities on national standardization in Africa (Task Team for Africa)

Report of the Task Team for Africa

Submitted by Task Team for Africa **

Summary:

The United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, aware of the specificity of Africa with regard to geographical names and the fact that a large number of languages in Africa are derived from unwritten languages, has been concerned about the problem of geographical names in Africa since the First United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. It has been clearly indicated at the Conferences that there is a need to start thinking about practical ways to help African countries to properly manage their geographical names. Given the limited progress made since then, and in order to help African countries to benefit more from the standardization of geographical names, a task team for Africa was set up at the twenty-second session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, held in 2004.

The Task Team for Africa was responsible in particular for conducting an assessment and for proposing appropriate solutions for the promotion of the standardization of geographical names in Africa and initiating relevant actions thereon, especially the establishment of entities responsible for the standardization of geographical names in each African country.

The full report includes all the actions undertaken by the Task Team for Africa since 2004 and includes proposals for new initiatives to further the development of geographical name activities in Africa.

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TASK TEAM FOR AFRICA REPORT

Reminder:

The United Nations Group of Experts on the standardization of geographical names, aware of the African specificity regarding geographical names whose languages are mostly derived from unwritten languages, has been concerned since his first conference on the geographical names problematic in Africa where it has been clearly indicated that there is a need to start thinking about practical ways to help African countries to manage properly their geographical names.

Given the limited progress made since then and in order to make these countries benefit more from the benefits of the standardization of geographical names, a Task Team for Africa was set up at the 23rd session of GENUNG in 2004.

This Task Team was particularly responsible for making a diagnosis and proposing appropriate solutions for the promotion of geographical names in Africa and initiating suitable actions, in particular the establishment of structures responsible for the standardization of geographical names in each African country.

This report includes all the actions undertaken by this Task Team for Africa since 2004 and proposes new initiatives to further improve the development of geographical names activities in Africa.

For this, several actions have been undertaken:

- More than five training courses were held in different African countries (Tunisia, Burkina Faso, Algeria, Kenya, Maputo, Cameroon, Madagascar).
- Organization of symposiums on the subject, in particular twice in Algiers and Tunis.
- Introduction of ECA / UN / CODIST and specialized African organizations especially in cartography (eg AOCRS, RCMRD).
- Organization of the 25th session of GENUNG in Africa in Nairobi (2009) with the collaboration of the CEA.
- Establishment of a Gaborone Action Plan (Botswana) with the contribution of ECA / UN and UNGEGN for the development of the standardization of geographical names in Africa.
- Provide African countries with a free databases software and gazetteers called 'GeoNyms' in collaboration with the CEA / UN.
- Organization of two international competitions for the benefit of the African countries which recorded an important participation of postulants of different African countries and encouragement prizes were awarded to the laureates.
- Reactivation of several National Commissions on Toponymy of different countries: Burkina Faso, Tunisia, Mali, Niger, Benin, Chad, Senegal

ACTIONS RECORDED SINCE THE 11TH UNGEGN CONFERENCE (8 - 17 AUGUST 2017, NEW YORK)

The participation in the UNGEGN Scientific Symposium and Joint Divisions and Working Group Meetings, Brussels, Belgium, 10-13 October 2018.

The meeting was organized jointly by the Dutch-speaking and German-speaking divisions and by the UNGEGN North Division and hosted by the National Geographic Institute of Belgium, was attended by more than four African countries (Burkina Faso, Niger, Senegal and Algeria) among more than 60 participants from different countries.

This meeting allowed African participants to become more familiar with the problem of the standardization of geographical names and the role and importance of specialized knowledge in the standardization of geographical names (role and importance of expert knowledge in the standardization of geographical names).

It should be noted that the participation of the representatives of the three African countries (Burkina Faso, Senegal, Niger) was possible only with the input of the Francophone Division.

In addition, the Task Team for Africa also participated in the meeting of the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation together with the Working Group on Advertising and Funding, Brussels, October 13th, 2018, (the Meeting of the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation jointly with the Working Group on Publicity and Funding., Brussels, October 13th, 2018).

During this meeting, which also has been attended by a representative from Burkina Faso, the Task Team contributed positively and made several proposals relating to the work of UNGEGN and the improvement of that of the Task Team for Africa.

PARTICIPATION IN THE FOURTH MEETING OF GGIM / AFRICA

The Task Team for Africa participated in the fourth meeting of GGIM / Africa, which was held in Addis Ababa during which a detailed report on geographical names activity in Africa was presented.

The Task Team for Africa has been very active and has issued several proposals for the improvement of geographical names activity in Africa.

Among these proposals was the establishment of a GISNUG Working Group for Africa; This proposal was very well received and recommended.

In addition, the African participants present in Addis Ababa and belonging to the North African Division of ECA / UN, reiterated their wish for UNGEGN to have a new North African Division, bringing together the countries of Sahel and those of North Africa since these countries share the same space, culture, languages, geographical names and consequently the same problems of standardization .

Finally, the proposal for the creation of an Unwritten Languages Division within UNGEGN was discussed and its importance highlighted.