

11 February 2019  
English  
Original: French

---

## United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names

### First session

New York, 29 April–3 May 2019

Agenda item 13 of the provisional agenda\*

**Geographical names as culture, heritage and identity,  
including indigenous, minority and regional languages and  
multilingual issues (Working Group on Geographical Names  
as Cultural Heritage).**

## Issues regarding toponyms from unwritten languages

### Summary\*\*

The report on issues regarding toponyms from unwritten languages largely summarizes the proposals contained in document E/CONF.105/123/CRP.123 of the eleventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (New York, 8–17 August 2017), regarding the need to establish a working group or sub-working group on the transcription systems for unwritten languages.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) considers languages as part of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity and advocates linguistic diversity.

The United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, taking into consideration the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, adopted by UNESCO on 17 October 2003, has recognized that toponyms are indeed part of the intangible cultural heritage and has noted the existence of a variety of threats to the use of certain toponyms, especially those derived from unwritten languages, despite the sense of identity and continuity attached to that use (resolution IX/4). It has also acknowledged in several of its resolutions (II/27, II/36, V/22, VII/5, VIII/1 and VIII/9) that geographical names are part of a nation's historical and cultural heritage and has emphasized the need to preserve and safeguard them, urging countries that had not already done so to undertake both the systematic collection of geographical names and the promotion of a greater understanding of their significance with respect to heritage and identity.

---

\* [GEGN.2/2019/1](#)

\*\* The full report, prepared by the Chair of the Task Team for Africa, Brahim Atoui, will be available as document GEGN.2/2019/49/CRP.49, in the language of submission only, at the following address: [https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/1st\\_session\\_UNGEGN.html](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/1st_session_UNGEGN.html).



The full text of this report contains proposals to remedy this situation, particularly in the specific case of Africa, and provides for the submission to the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names of a draft resolution on the creation of a working group on toponyms from unwritten languages.

---