

5 February 2021

Original: English

**United Nations Group of Experts on
Geographical Names
2021 session**

Virtual, 3–7 May 2021

Agenda item 6 (a) of the provisional agenda*

**National and international standardization of geographical
names: names collection, office treatment, national
authorities, features beyond a single sovereignty and
international cooperation****Geographical names standardization in Greenland****Summary****

Geographical names standardization in Greenland dates back to 1 February 1934, when a geographical names committee was established in Denmark through an executive order. The objective was to attain an overview of the names and number of localities in Greenland. In 1984, this responsibility was transferred to the Greenland Home Rule authorities, although a law establishing a geographical names authority, the Greenland Place Name Committee, was not adopted until 1989.

On 1 January 1996, single authorization was introduced, meaning that only Greenlandic-language geographical names are standardized. Where two names exist for one locality – i.e. a Greenlandic name and a Danish or foreign name – the Greenlandic geographical name is the only valid form in official use. In cases where no Greenlandic name exists for a locality, the existing Danish or foreign geographical name form is used.

The most recent law on geographical names dates from 2017, when the Government of Greenland established the framework of obligations of the Greenland Place Name Committee. The Committee has the authority to standardize geographical names in Greenland. Its office is located on the premises of the Language Secretariat of Greenland (*Oqaasileriffik*).

The Committee maintains a register of approximately 33,000 geographical names. Of those, approximately 27,000 names were derived from the original collections from the 1930s and the 1950s. The register is kept in an open-source system maintained by the Language Secretariat of Greenland.

* GEGN.2/2021/1.

** The full report was prepared by the project manager for the collection of place names and Academic Secretary of the Greenland Place Name Committee of the Language Secretariat of Greenland (*Oqaasileriffik*), Arnaq B. Johansen. It will be available under document symbol GEGN.2/2021/44/CRP.44, in the language of submission only, at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/unegen/sessions/2nd_session_2021/.



For two years, the Government of Greenland has cooperated with the Danish Agency for Data Supply and Efficiency and the Danish Ministry of Defence on a mapping project of Greenland. The Language Secretariat of Greenland is in charge of quality assurance, to ensure that the spelling of geographical names and the corresponding location information are correct. In this connection, the Language Secretariat of Greenland is adopting the basic data programme of the Government of Greenland, which involves migrating the geographical name register from one system to another. Previously, locations associated with geographical names were registered as points. In the new basic data programme, they are registered as polygons, which is an improvement in the design of the register. Nevertheless, there have been some challenges, as follows:

(a) The previous system operated with only one layer of geographical names, making it difficult to attain an overview of the content. The new system will implement two layers, in order to monitor which names need to be reauthorized and which have already been approved;

(b) Another challenge concerns the 2019 law on personal data protection, one consequence of which is that personal data stored in the register must be removed, making it difficult to determine the connection between the content of the register and the minutes of meetings at which the Committee took its decisions.

The strategy of the Committee is to prioritize quality over quantity. It is working hard to achieve a more systematic workflow, comprehensive data curation to remove duplicates, etc. In addition, the technical upgrade to a two-layer system will improve efficiency and strengthen cooperation with other authorities in Greenland.
