

7 May 2021, 17h EST

Final Recommendations and Decisions (English only)

**United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names
Second Session**

Agenda item 20, Presentation and adoption of Decisions

New York, 3-7 May 2021

**I. Matters calling for action by the Economic and
Social Council or brought to its attention**

A. Recommendations for adoption by the Council

1. The United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names recommends to the Economic and Social Council the adoption of the following:

Recommendation 1

The Economic and Social Council:

- (a) Recalls ECOSOC decision E/2019/230 which decided that the Bureau of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names should undertake the development of a draft strategic plan and programme of work for the new Group of Experts, and notes that the Bureau of the Group of Experts has taken into consideration and fulfilled all the conditions as requested in decision E/2019/230 including, conducting three global consultations and a virtual webinar prior to the second session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names;
- (b) Welcomes the UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029 submitted to and adopted at the second session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names;
- (c) Approves the adoption of the UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029, recognizing that it is a living document, with the provisions that it shall be evaluated periodically by the Group of Experts for its implementation and, updated and amended, as appropriate and when necessary;
- (d) Encourages the Bureau of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names to assess its structure of subsidiary bodies to allow for efficiency in the implementation of the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work, and if needed, propose its reorganization; and
- (e) Also encourages Member States, Divisions, Working Groups and Task Teams of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names to report on their activities to implement the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work in the sessions of UNGEGN.

Recommendation 2

The Economic and Social Council:

- (a) Recalls that General Assembly resolution 70/1 called for ECOSOC inter-governmental bodies and forums to reflect the integrated nature of the Sustainable Development Goals as well as the interlinkages between them;
- (b) Recalls resolution A/RES/72/305 on Review of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 68/1 on the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council, where the General Assembly emphasized that the Economic and Social Council should aim at creating synergy and coherence in its work to ensure efficiency and effectiveness, and that it should ensure harmonization and coordination of the agendas and work programmes of its subsidiary bodies, while ensuring that the principles, critical aspects and implementation gaps of the 2030 Agenda are addressed;
- (c) Acknowledges that there are numerous elements of geographical names standardization with potential connection to the natural environment;
- (d) Recognises that UNGEEN's work programme to date has not fully explored the relationship that geographical names, national names programs, and the work of UNGEEN has, or could have, in shaping human understanding of, and impact, on the environment; and
- (e) Decides that the Group of Experts consider current and potential connections between geographical names and the environment and incorporate examples of relevant practices, research or working relationships in their operations and deliberations.

Decision 2/2021/1 Report of the Chair

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Took note of the report of the Chair of the Group of Experts;
- (b) Appreciated the leadership of the Chair, the work of the Bureau and the working group convenors, and the support from the Statistics Division in arranging and preparing for this virtual second session during the ongoing pandemic;
- (c) Announced the new Vice-Chair, Susan Birtles (Australia) and thanked Hasan Abidin (Indonesia) for his service; and
- (d) Congratulated the efforts to prioritize the development of the draft strategic plan and programme of work and in making progress towards integration with other United Nations institutions.

Decision 2/2021/2 Report of the Secretariat

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Welcomed the report of the Secretariat describing the activities undertaken in the two-year intersessional period coordinating the work of the Group of Experts, particularly the preparations for the Second Session of the new UNGEEN;
- (b) Thanked the UNSD and by extension the Secretariat for their continued valuable and unfaltering support to the Group of Experts, particularly during the difficult

times and restrictions faced in the past year due to the global pandemic, and for the ongoing coordination of the activities of the Group, which enabled the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029 to come to fruition;

- (c) Appreciated the work done by the Secretariat in maintaining the website and reviving the online World Geographical Names Database; the completion of these modifications and access to the database as soon as possible will be of great benefit, encourages Member States to supply their authorized data and sound files and/or to update their existing information, and welcomes Canada's offer of assistance as needed; and
- (d) Noted with support, the recommendations of the Secretariat to further strengthen the operations of the Group of Experts which includes (i) convening regular virtual meetings with the Bureau of its 24 linguistic and geographical divisions with the Bureau, (ii) identifying resources to be used to develop e-learning toponymy platforms to sustain its capacity development offering (iii) creating a working group on National Names Standardization which could incorporate the Task Team for Africa, and (iv) identifying officers to fill vacant positions, and designing succession planning strategies.

Decision 2/2021/3

National, Divisional and Working Group on Country Names Reports

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Noted with thanks the 39 reports and ten written statements submitted, their summary provided by the Chair and the highlights provided by the delegates of some of those countries;
- (b) Expressed appreciation for the breadth of information made available about the organization of national standardization of geographical names, the rules applied to the standardization of endonyms and exonyms, the collection, checking and archiving of geographical names, the management of those data, the value of those names as cultural heritage and the outreach about this process, as well as the consequences of the pandemic on the activities in that matter;
- (c) Reaffirms the Bureau's commitment to produce a template for the country reports long before the 3rd session;
- (d) Took note of the reports submitted by 13 out of the 24 geographical or linguistic divisions of the Group of Experts and expressed appreciation for the rich body of information presenting relevant methods, issues and techniques, as well as of the written statements;
- (e) Encouraged Divisions to model work based on the operations of other divisions and the feedback provided and also encouraged individual countries to continue supporting the activities of Divisions;
- (f) Took note of the updated UNGEGN list of country names; and
- (g) Acknowledged the work of the two Co-convenors of the Working Group on Country Names, Leo Dillon (USA) and Elisabeth Calvarin (France), now retired, and expressed its congratulations to them for their efforts, as well as its appreciation to the Chair for updating the list of country names, which should be maintained in future;

Decision 2/2021/4
Cooperation and liaison with other organizations

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Took note of the reports submitted for discussion by the representatives of the Joint International Cartographic Association/International Geographical Union (ICA/IGU) Commission on Toponymy, the Latin America Division of UNGEGN, and the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management;
- (b) Took note of considerations raised in relation to cooperation and liaison with organisations additional to those who made presentations, with the current focus on IGU;
- (c) Recognized the importance of relationships between the Group of Experts and the organizations with which it maintains liaison;
- (d) Welcomed the invitation from the ICA/IGU Commission on Toponymy to host symposiums on topics to support the work of UNGEGN;
- (e) Welcomed the invitation for more formal cooperation between the Group of Experts and the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management; and
- (f) Acknowledged the intention for cooperation between the Group of Experts and the Global Taskforce for the International Decade of Indigenous Languages.

Decision 2/2021/5
National and international standardization of geographical names

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Took note of nine reports for discussion and six for information submitted under this agenda item;
- (b) Welcomed the interesting exploration of issues emerging in the range of national standardization programmes;
- (c) Encouraged names authorities to share their policies and principles with regard to details of language through diverse media affiliated with the Group of Experts, and to disseminate their authorized geographical names as widely as possible;
- (d) Called for the open and free use of geographical names data from various sources under appropriate regulation framework;
- (e) Announced the new Coordinator for toponymic guidelines, Jasper Hogerwerf (Netherlands) and thanked Gerhard Rampl (Austria) for his service;
- (f) Welcomed the recent updates to the inventory of toponymic guidelines and its dissemination through various media devices;
- (g) Encouraged Member States that had not yet prepared toponymic guidelines to do so in accordance with the template suggested by the Coordinator and regularly update those guidelines and report to the subsequent sessions of the Group of Experts;
- (h) Took note of problems occurring in the use of geographical names by the providers and platform of maps and encouraged the Group of Experts to find measures by which to be involved in line with the UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029, for example, writing to them to highlight the problems found, informing about the benefits gained by using standardized geographical names, and offering to collaborate on sharing authoritative information through various discussion forums; and
- (i) Noted with concern the resistance by some governments and others to use standardized geographical names (such as when driven by tourism imperatives), recognized tools to help such as legislation, education and outreach, suggested this matter be open for future

discussion to share good practice and experiences with a view to stronger supporting advice from the Group of Experts,

Decision 2/2021/6

Social and economic benefits, supporting sustainable development, measures taken and proposed for the implementation of resolutions and evaluation of the work of the Group of Experts

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Took note of the five reports for discussion and one for information submitted under this agenda item;
- (b) Appreciated the work of the Bureau and the working group conveners, the support from the Statistics Division and all the input from States Members of the United Nations in drafting a strategic plan and programme of work;
- (c) Approved this draft strategic plan and programme of work as a guiding framework of the Group of Experts and geographical names standardization of the Member States during the period of 2021-2029;
- (d) Acknowledged the progress concerning the review of the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council resolutions for their relevance to the work of the Group of Experts and encouraged the Bureau to coordinate an update of the review before each Session;
- (e) Welcomed the initiative to extend discussion to the relevance of geographical names to responding to the coronavirus pandemic;
- (f) Called for further exploration of the theme of ‘geographical names and the environment’ to better understand the role of geographical names and the actions of names authorities in relation to the sustainable development goals, and to pursue further synergies across ECOSOC subsidiary bodies; and
- (g) Appreciated the work done by the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation to improve the functional efficacy of the Group of Experts, including its involvement of in implementing the recommendations from the 1st session of UNGEGN, motivating the implementation of resolutions, and maintaining the multilingual database for resolutions.

Decision 2/2021/7

Issues of publicity for the Group of Experts and funding of Group projects (Working Group on Publicity and Funding)

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Took note of the report for discussion submitted under this agenda item;
- (b) Welcomed the exploration of work undertaken in the area of publicity and the engagement in the UNGEGN Strategy 2021-2029 presented in the report; and
- (c) Encouraged further exploration to create a sustainable model for the funding of projects through an UNGEGN Trust Fund under the umbrella UNSD Trust Fund, securing transparency, efficiency, and governance.

Decision 2/2021/8**Activities on the standardization of geographical names in Africa**

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Took note of the two reports for discussion submitted under this agenda item, as well as two oral presentations, and recognized the actions conducted by for the standardization of geographical names in Africa, and of the difficulties expressed in recognising the importance of place names standardization by government authorities, the difficulties of continental experts coming together to work on this issue and the need of additional resources;
- (b) Expressed appreciation for the kind reception and offer of assistance to convene meetings and support the GeoNyms tool given by United Nations Economic Commission for Africa to the requests and suggestions made by the the Group of Experts; and
- (c) Emphasized that assistance could be provided mainly in the areas of (i) raising awareness among government authorities, (ii) facilitating the networking of experts, and (iii) providing an update GeoNyms online geographical names management tool.

Decision 2/2021/9**Toponymic Education (Working Group on Training Courses in Toponymy)**

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Took note of the four reports for discussion and one for information submitted under this agenda item;
- (b) Welcomed the developments in online training courses in toponymy developed by Indonesia, the online course on the Norwegian Place Name Act from Norway;
- (c) Expressed appreciation of planned streamed audiovisual lectures on toponymy by the Working Group on Training Courses in Toponymy;
- (d) Showed support for the suggestion that the Working Group on Training Courses in Toponymy collaborate with the Divisions on developing content and finding suitable presenters in different UN languages;
- (e) Encouraged Member States to indicate the topics most useful to them in developing their geographical names standardization programmes; and
- (f) Welcomed the invitation to re-establish the planning for a post-COVID-19 regional training course in toponymy in Indonesia for the Asia South-East Division.

Decision 2/2021/10**Activities Relating to the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology**

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Took note of the three reports for discussion under this agenda item;
- (b) Expressed appreciation for the preparation of language-specific versions of the glossary of terminology and encouraged other such works;
- (c) Acknowledged the need to evaluate the possibility for revision of the Glossary of Terms for the Standardization of Geographical Names; and
- (d) Encouraged Experts to continue to suggest and the Working Group to address proposals for additions, modifications, and corrections to the database of toponymic terminology.

Decision 2/2021/11

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

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Took note of the eight reports for discussion and five for information, submitted under this agenda item;
- (b) Noted the wide range of issues that the topic of geographical names as cultural heritage contain;
- (c) Supported the continuation of the sharing of national experiences and engagement with indigenous groups to educate others within the Group of Experts and promote the work; and
- (d) Encouraged further cooperation together with the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage to discuss the different functions of endonyms and exonyms and as parts of a distinctive cultural heritage.

Decision 2/2021/12

Exonyms (Working Group on Exonyms)

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Took note of the four reports for discussion and four for information, as well as the written statements, submitted under this agenda item;
- (b) Appreciated the work and deliberation on exonyms conducted by the experts;
- (c) Decided to carry on further discussions in finding guidelines that reconcile the current resolutions of the UNCSGN on exonyms and its acknowledgement of exonyms as part of our cultural heritage; and
- (d) Encouraged further cooperation together with the Working Group on Exonyms to discuss the different functions of endonyms and exonyms and as parts of a distinctive cultural heritage.

Decision 2/2021/13

Toponymic data files and gazetteers (data processing and tools, database management, data dissemination: products and services) (Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers)

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Took note of the nine reports for discussion and three for information, submitted under this agenda item, and welcomed the information made available, the active participation and the efforts undertaken by Member States to inform about and enhance the geographical names data management;
- (b) Took note of the Working Group's report on the recent and current activities and the other reports submitted by experts from nine different Member States and one Division;
- (c) Adopted and formally ratified the renaming to the Working Group on Geographical Names Data Management;

- (d) Affirmed the support for the Strategic Plan and the Programme of Work outlined for the Working Group for the period 2021-2029 and the willingness of Member States to participate and contribute in the action items;
- (e) Requested the Working Group to deliver its technical expertise and advice for Strategy 1 Technical Expertise, and for Strategies 2-5, where requested;
- (f) Noted that Linked Data is another stage in the evolution of data management methodologies that the Group of Experts and Member States need to consider to facilitate widespread use of standardized geographical names;
- (g) Requested the Working Group facilitate collaborations and workshops on Linked Data between national names authorities and Linked Data practitioners in order to provide practical guidance on organizational and technical issues and processes, to continue to share information and case studies, to demonstrate the combined benefits of standardized geographical names management and Linked Data development, and to enable intercommunication of Linked Data, amongst others, providing an overview of ontologies;
- (h) Agreed that for the online discussion forum (Wiki) of the Working Group, it may work more effectively in becoming a forum for documentation sharing;
- (i) Recommended that developments have to be integrated into national and regional spatial data infrastructures (Resolution VIII/6, UNCSGN), and be coordinated with UN-GGIM activities related to the fundamental data theme ‘Geographical Names’; and
- (j) Encouraged all Member States to continue to share learnings, challenges and ongoing plans within the Working Group towards an efficient geographical names data management, emphasizing innovation in methodology and technology for the development of national geographical names databases, web services and applications for a variety of purposes, for example health, emergency and other services, and particularly the monitoring of UN sustainable development goals according to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Decision 2/2021/14

Writing systems and pronunciation (Working Group on Romanization Systems)

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Took note of the Working Group’s report on the recent and current activities and the three further reports submitted by experts from three different Member States;
- (b) Agreed to continue to investigate innovative methods to be used either for romanization or recording pronunciation of geographical names.
- (c) Noted the work on transliteration between non-Roman script writing systems and encouraged Member States to continue such projects; and
- (d) Encouraged all Member States to continue to share ongoing work with the Working Group towards further implementation of existing UN romanization systems and towards adoption of new systems.

Decision 2/2021/15

Other Geographical Names Issues

‘Creating an Equal Society through Geographical Names’

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Welcomed the convening of the panel discussion ‘Creating an Equal Society through Geographical Names’ held as a side event, and notes with satisfaction the appreciation and interest expressed by the 70 participants in the exploration of the role of geographical names in the pursuit of an inclusive and equal society, and notes with satisfaction the presentation on the potential for geographical names to contribute to the inclusiveness of society;
- (b) Recognized that this issue is one of the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals, which it had endorsed, but also that the possible contribution of geographical names to this target has to be reconciled with other practical and heritage fundamental functions;
- (c) Invited the UNGEGN Bureau and the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage to consider the development of guidelines aimed at equality and inclusion in geographical names in harmony with the principles on restoring, protecting and preserving cultural heritage, noting the contribution to relevant UN Sustainable Development Goals;
- (d) Expressed hope that national names authorities consider developing processes and mechanisms for geographical names standardization to achieve greater equality in naming, and respect the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities to their own geographical names; and
- (e) Urged the UNGEGN Bureau and its relevant Working Groups to pursue the topic in future events and sessions through dedicated meeting arrangements, with a view to a possible recommendation to the Economic and Social Council.

Decision 2/2021/16

Other Business

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Expresses deep appreciation that the International Geographical Union (IGU) Award Committee decided to confer upon Ms. Helen Kerfoot, UNGEGN Delegate from Canada, one of two IGU Laureat d’Honneur awards for 2021; and
- (b) Noted her exceptional contribution in many fields relating to geography and in particular with the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.