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English

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

New York, 3 – 7 May 2021

**Item 7 of the provisional agenda \***

**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**

## **Report of the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation**

Submitted by the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation\*\*

### **Summary:**

The full report highlights the activities of the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation since the 2019 session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names. Two in-person gatherings were cancelled due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic: a joint meeting with the Working Group on Publicity and Funding due to be held in Suwon, Republic of Korea, in July 2020, and a symposium co-organized with the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage due to be held in Halmstad, Sweden, in October 2020. All activities have been carried out online instead.

The main focus of the Working Group has been to progress the implementation of two of the recommendations adopted at the 2019 session, namely recommendation 1 (developing a draft strategic plan and programme of work for the Group of Experts) and recommendation 3 (reviewing the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council and for their relevance to the Group of Experts). Those two tasks are of crucial significance in that they set a long-term goal for the activities of the Group of Experts under the general supervision and direction of its parent body, the Economic and Social Council. Details will be reported in separate working papers. The full report also covers the trends with regard to the implementation of the resolutions on the standardization of geographical names in Member States, based on the working papers they have submitted, together with the maintenance of the resolutions database and the results of the evaluation survey conducted at the end of the 2019 session.

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\* GEGN.2/2021/1

\*\* Prepared by Sungjae Choo (Republic of Korea), Convenor of the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation.

## **Work plan of the Working Group**

The work plan of the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation, guided by the resolutions V/4 and VI/4 of the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSSGN), was noted and confirmed at the First Session of UNGEGN with minor changes adjusting to the new UNGEGN as a combined body with the former UNCSSGN. At the First Session, it was recommended to establish a strategic plan and programme of work of UNGEGN and to review the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council resolutions and find their relevance to UNGEGN, both of which was supposed to be an on-going task involving the Working Group. Along this line, a revised work plan is proposed as:

- ♦ Evaluating the functioning and efficacy of UNGEGN and the implementation of resolutions and recommendations, taking note of the UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work and the General Assembly and ECOSOC resolutions;
- ♦ Finding ways to involve Member States not currently participating in the activities of UNGEGN;
- ♦ Looking at the needs of Member States to achieve national standardization of their geographical names; and
- ♦ Proposing actions to increase the effectiveness of UNGEGN and its Divisions and Working Groups.

## **Two meetings planned in 2020**

It was regrettable that the coronavirus pandemic prevented two meetings planned in 2020 from happening. One was a joint meeting of the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation and the Working Group on Publicity and Funding which was scheduled on 5-9 July in Suwon, Korea and hosted by the National Geographic Information Institute (NGII), Republic of Korea. A number of agenda items were supposed to be discussed, including drafting a strategic plan for UNGEGN, implementing recommendations adopted at the 1st session, preparing for the 2nd session in 2021, and on-going tasks of the two Working Groups. The meeting was planned to be preceded by a workshop on a common topic of geographical names standardization.

The other was an UNGEGN symposium on Cultural Heritage and Commercialization of Geographical Names, jointly organized by the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage and the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation at Halmstad University, Halmstad, Sweden, 20–24 October 2020. Given the situation that geographical names as cultural heritage is highly valued, while commercialization of geographical names is a trend not to be ignored, this symposium was intended to understand the nature of the problem and discuss measures to deal with it. The event, with which joint Working Group and Division meetings were also planned, has been postponed until such time as the pandemic situation allows.

## **Implementing recommendations from the 1st Session**

The Working Group has been involved in implementing two recommendations proposed by the 1st Session and adopted by the Economic and Social Council, Recommendation 1 and 3. Implementing Recommendation 1, which was to develop a draft strategic plan and programme of work for the new UNGEGN, has been a huge work orchestrated by the UNGEGN Bureau and all Working Groups in close consultation with Member States. In the draft strategic plan, Strategy 3, titled *Effective work programmes*, is closely related to the work plan of the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation, and is itemized as follows:

- i. Encourage active participation and promote compatible standards and methods in the work undertaken by Member States to contribute to UNGEGN's aims;
- ii. Deliver products, outcomes, policy guidance and advice that support coordinated activities at national, divisional and international levels, taking note of UNGEGN resolutions and recommendations and leveraging social media, mobile applications and web-based tools;
- iii. Ensure that UNGEGN's organizational structure is appropriate, efficient, relevant and impactful to deliver maximum value to Member States; and
- iv. Encourage exchange of knowledge, good practices and experience among Member States, aided by Divisions and Working Groups, to facilitate development of legislation and policies on geographical names standardization at the national level.

Action items under Strategy 3 should be further referenced and implemented in the future work of the Working Group.

Recommendation 3 of the 1st Session asked for a review of recent General Assembly and ECOSOC resolutions to find their relevance to the work of UNGEGN. In order to implement this recommendation, resolutions were selected, listed and reviewed for their relevance to UNGEGN in general, and the draft strategic plan and its Working Groups in particular. Some topics e.g. Sustainable Development Goals, indigenous people and their heritages are conspicuously eminent in inspiring relevance to the general direction of UNGEGN. More details will be reported in a separate working paper.

### **Implementing resolutions**

As an on-going focus and mandate, the Working Group has tried to encourage the implementation of resolutions at the country level, as well as in the UNGEGN context. The documentation guidelines for the UNGEGN sessions request each working paper to indicate the resolution(s) which relates to its theme.

The degree of reference to resolutions, however, is not yet high. An examination of the working papers presented at the 1st session shows that 25.6% (34 out of 133) referred to resolutions. This rate was a little higher than the 11th Conference and the 30th session in 2017 (23.9%, 42 out of 176), but lower than the 29th session in 2016 (36.5%, 32 out of 88). Frequently referenced resolutions included:

- I/4. National standardization: 9 papers
- I/7. Regional meetings: 6 papers
- VIII/1. Promotion of minority group and indigenous geographical names: 6 papers
- VIII/2. Commemorative naming practices for geographical features: 6 papers
- VIII/4. Exonyms: 5 papers
- VIII/6. Integration of geographical names data into national and regional spatial data infrastructures: 5 papers
- VIII/9. Geographical names as cultural heritage: 5 papers

Germany, Canada, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Sweden, Latvia and the Dutch- and German-speaking Division reported their activities by resolutions.

The evaluation survey conducted at the 1st Session shows that the resolutions are useful for promoting the standardization of geographical names (30 'very useful' and 7 'useful,' accounting for 84.1%) and implementing them is important in each country's work on geographical names (32 'very important' and 6 'important,' accounting for 86.3%). Suggestions were made to raise the awareness of

implementing resolutions, including the support of UNGEGN, its Divisions and Working Groups, more institutional or personal communication during the inter-sessional period, making use of the Bulletin or workshops, providing guidelines, etc. A stronger framework, e.g. formal legislation, was also suggested.

### **UNCSGN resolutions and UNGEGN recommendations database**

A total of 211 resolutions from the First to Eleventh UNCSGN are now available in PDF texts in English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Portuguese and Korean, and through the web-based database in English, French, Spanish, Arabic and Korean. Both texts and database are accessible at the UNGEGN website: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/ungegn/confGeneral.html>. The database, hosted by the NGII of the Republic of Korea, provides a useful engine to search resolutions by Conference, subject and key words.

As UNCSGN terminated and a new UNGEGN was launched, the database has now good reason to be re-designed. The UNCSGN resolutions are still valid as guidelines of the national standardization of geographical names in each Member State, so it will be useful to retain the current format for the 11 Conferences with the 26 subjects. When recommendations or resolutions adopted at the new UNGEGN sessions are accumulated, it will be easier to figure out how to add new ones to the UNCSGN resolutions, for example, whether they should form a separate database with new subject headings, or whether in some way they should be combined with the existing resolutions.

### **Evaluation of the 1st Session**

Forty-four responses to the evaluation questionnaire were received through an on-line survey to the participants of the 1st Session in 2019. All of the respondents indicated that it had met their expectations. The most expected aspect when coming to the session was ‘learning from other countries’ experiences (44 responses),’ followed by ‘networking with other experts (43),’ ‘learning of updated standardization issues (40)’ and ‘informing others of his/her country’s experiences (38).’ 39 respondents (88.6%) rated the success of the session very high or high.

The positive assessment remained when dividing into each item of the programs and contents. However, the assessment of the operation and logistical matters of the session was not that good. Such items as allocation of time to agenda items and working papers, time available for working group and division meetings and cooperation with GGIM were indicated for improvement. The five-day duration was generally satisfactory, but more efficient time management was suggested (See Appendix 1 for more details).

The evaluation for the second session will be conducted through an on-line survey. Questions will be adjusted to the nature of a virtual meeting. The link for the survey will be provided during the meeting.

### **Strategic Plan and future tasks of the Working Group**

The UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2019 will be acting as general guidelines for the work of UNGEGN, and thus for the tasks of working groups. Action items concerning the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation, all of which are listed under Strategy 3 (Efficient work programmes) in the draft as of February 2021, include the following (*time frame in parenthesis*):

- Codify the resolutions and recommendations into a coherent and hierarchical whole (Review and plan in 2021; prior work done by 2023; subsequent work after 2023, if needed);
- Encourage experts to refer to the resolutions and recommendations in their work and particularly in preparing working papers (Report to every session; announce in the documentation);
- Continue to maintain and update the compendium and database of the resolutions and recommendations (Redesign the compendium and database in 2021; update following every session);
- Review the function and operation of Divisions and consider any change in the organizational structure of UNGEGN (Initiate in 2021; rounds of discussions and feedbacks by 2023; and then an adjustment made by 2025, if needed);
- Review the documentation guidelines and submission schedule for national/divisional reports and, if needed, elaborate them (Assess for every session);
- Monitor and evaluate UNGEGN's work programme regularly (Assess annually; organize Bureau and WG meetings in 2022, 2024, 2026); and
- Elaborate measures to increase the number of Member States that have functioning authorities for geographical names standardization (Ongoing; encourage organizing discussion forums).

These items will remain valid as guidelines for the task of the Working Group. The Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation has held joint meetings with the Working Group on Publicity and Funding to achieve synergy effects. The Working Group is steered by the convenor and the UNGEGN Bureau, but open to other Working Group convenors and any interested experts.

**Points for discussion:**

**The Group of Experts is invited to:**

- (a) Take note of the report and progress made by the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation; and
- (b) Express its views on the way forward concerning the Working Group's work plan and the upcoming actions up to the Third Session in 2023.

**APPENDIX 1. Results of the Evaluation Survey of the 1st Session, New York, April-May 2017****Table 1. Evaluation of the usefulness of each program and content of the Conference**

	very useful	useful	moderately useful	of little use	not useful	very useful and useful (%)
Documents – content, reading, discussion	19	24	1	0	0	97.7
Special presentations	13	26	4	1	0	88.6
Workshops	9	16	7	0	0	78.1
Working Group meetings	26	11	5	0	0	88.1
Division meetings	17	13	2	1	1	88.2
Talking/networking with other delegates	29	15	0	0	0	100.0

**Table 2. Evaluation of the operation of the Session**

	excel- lent	good	adequate	poor	very poor	excellent and good (%)
Duration of the meeting (5 days)	19	12	7	4	2	70.5
Allocation of time to agenda items, WPs	11	14	16	3	0	56.8
Distinguishing discussion/information papers	14	16	10	4	0	68.2
Discussion in response to papers and presentations	9	23	8	3	0	74.4
Summarizing groups of documents	15	19	7	2	0	79.1
Resolutions, decisions, recommendations developed by the Session	9	17	9	2	0	70.3
Time available for WG and Division meetings	11	14	9	9	0	58.1
Cooperation with GGIM	6	14	13	3	0	55.6

**Table 3. Evaluation of the usefulness of UNCSGN resolutions for managers of geographical names in promoting geographical names standardization**

	very useful	useful	moderately useful	of little use	not useful	very useful and useful (%)
UNCSGN resolutions	30	7	6	1	0	84.1

**Table 4. Evaluation of the importance of the implementation of UNCSGN resolutions in each country's work on geographical names**

	very important	important	moderately important	of little importance	not important	very important and important (%)
Implementation of UNCSGN resolutions	32	6	5	1	0	86.3