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**United Nations Group of Experts on**

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**Reports: National and international meetings and conferences**

**International Symposium on the Standardization of  
Geographical Names  
—Introducing the Efforts and Contributions by  
UNGEGN and Japan—**

Submitted by Japan \*\*

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\*\* Prepared by Geospatial Information Authority of Japan

## **International Symposium on the Standardization of Geographical Names**

### **— Introducing the Efforts and Contributions by UNGEGN and Japan —**

On March 30, 2021, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and Geospatial Information Authority of Japan co-hosted "International Symposium on the Standardization of Geographical Names — Introducing the Efforts and Contributions by UNGEGN and Japan" with the participation of Mr. Pierre JAILLARD, Chairperson of UNGEGN, and many Japanese experts on geographical names. At the symposium, the experts made presentations and the participants actively discussed the technical perspectives on geographical names, and it enhanced the participants' understanding on the efforts and contributions of Japan regarding geographical names as well as the work of UNGEGN.

The symposium was held in Tokyo and participated by both offline and online attendees. At the offline venue, necessary measures to prevent COVID-19 infection were taken. There were about 40 participants in total, and the meeting was co-moderated by Dr. WATANABE Kohei (Teikyo University) and Mr SASAGAWA Akira (Geospatial Information Authority of Japan).

At the beginning of the symposium, Mr. MATSUI Shinji, Director of Specialized Agencies Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan made the opening remarks. In his remarks, Mr. Matsui emphasized the significance of the standardization of geographical names by pointing out that it contributes to the UN activities including in the areas of PKO and disaster management as well as the promotion of SDGs, to which Japan has been putting importance. He also mentioned UNGEGN's important role as the venue for the technical discussion, and reiterated Japan's respect towards the technical and academic nature of UNGEGN. He stated that Japan has been supporting UNGEGN's aim to promote discussion on the standardization of geographical names through technical contributions, and when there are any actions to undermine this UNGEGN's nature, aim and constant efforts, Japan has been consistently making its efforts to encourage adherence to its technical mandate, for the benefit of UNGEGN and the international community as a whole. Mr. Matsui ended his remarks by thanking Japanese experts including Professor TANABE Hiroshi, who is the chair of Asia East Division, and Dr. WATANABE Kohei for their presence, leadership and valuable contributions in UNGEGN, and by expressing his expectations for active discussion among the participants in the symposium.

Mr. Pierre JAILLARD, Chairperson of UNGEGN, gave an on-line Keynote Presentation from France, titled "the Activities of the Geographical Names Board of France and UNGEGN", describing the importance of domestic efforts based on the past experience of the standardization of geographical names in France, and the efforts of UNGEGN. Prior to his presentation, as "Introduction to the Keynote Presentation -- the activities of UNGEGN (in particular its Exonym Working Group)", Dr. WATANABE Kohei explained the nature of UNGEGN meetings, the structure of Divisions and WGs, past UNCSGN resolutions, trends in Exonym WG discussions, and Chairperson Jaillard's background.

In his Keynote Presentation, Chairperson. Jaillard introduced the experience of standardization of geographical names in France. He mentioned that National Commission of Toponym was established in 1987 with the functions of coordinating four organizations: the organization in charge of land geographical names, the organization in charge of marine geographical names, the organization in charge of statistics, and the organization in charge of foreign geographical names. He also mentioned that during the reorganization in 2011, initiatives involving local governments were undertaken, and that National Commission of Toponym has represented France in the UNGEGN since 2006.

In addition, he explained the history of UNGEGN's efforts since the inception of UNCSGN in 1959, and noted that UNGEGN currently conducts biennial conferences efficiently with the participation of not only experts representing 80 countries, but also observers such as ISO and IHO, as well as private companies such as Google, and also mentioned that they are currently focusing

especially on activities related to Africa. He also emphasized the need for collaboration between UNGEGN and geographic organization of each country, using the determination on country names in the six official UN languages as an example. Moreover, he described the history of discussions on exonyms in UNGEGN, and that since the Exonym WG was established in 2002, exonyms have become recognized as a cultural and heritage value of geographical names. Finally, it was noted that the principles adopted by UNGEGN must continue to evolve and progress.

Regarding his presentation, the participants asked questions and made comments including on the backgrounds of the unification of the functions of four French national organizations, the challenges of determining geographical names for local governments in France, the definition of exonyms in UNGEGN, the importance of continuing collaboration between UNGEGN and those involved in Japan, and the efforts of standardization of geographical names in Africa. Through this lively discussion between Chairperson Jaillard as well as the keynote presentation, participants were able to deepen their understandings on the works of UNGEGN and other countries greatly.

Presentations were also given by several Japanese geographical name experts. Prof. TANABE Hiroshi, Tokyo University, and Prof. OKAMOTO Kohei, Aichi University, described the challenges of standardization of geographical names in Japan under the title "Engagement with the standardization of geographical names by the sub-committee on geographical names of Science Council of Japan." Based on his own experience of participating in UNGEGN, Prof. Tanabe described the importance of UNGEGN as a forum for discussion among international experts on geographical names, the history of efforts by Japanese academics, and the publication of specialized books on geographical names. Prof. Okamoto gave an overview of the sub-committee on geographical names of Science Council of Japan and its history, and the importance of the efforts of experts on geographic names in Japan, including the trends in international efforts such as IGU and ICA.

Under the title "School education and the standardization of geographical names", Mr. HONDA Tomohiko, Teikoku-Shoin co.ltd., gave a presentation on the notation of geographical names in atlases used in schools. He explained the industry's efforts to standardize the notation of foreign geographical names (especially country and capital names) in Japanese textbooks, the changes and ingenuity in the notation of foreign geographical names (names of natural features), the standards for notating domestic geographical names, and the problems with the form of kanji used. Participants made several comments on the difficulty of notating foreign geographical names.

Mr. HAYASAKA Hisato, Chief of Administrative District Section, Geographical Name Information Division, National Mapping Department, Geospatial Information Authority of Japan, presented Experimental release of webmap: "Japan map in multilingual notation" as GSI's contributions on multiple languages correspondence. He gave a basic introduction to multilingual webmap and the background to its development, how to convert from Japanese to English, French, Korean, Chinese, and Romanized Japanese, and efficient annotation display using vector tile technology. During the question and answer session, participants asked technical questions about the conversion methods, and also commented that this was an interesting initiative from the perspective of UNGEGN discussions.

After the presentations by the participants, Dr. WATANABE Kohei moderated a discussion session, and it turned out to be very lively one. The participants gave various opinions and comments, such as Mr. Jaillard's experience in France provided a very good hint for Japan's future efforts, the importance of promoting efforts in cooperation among related parties in Japan, and suggestions for utilizing information technology such as geocoding. The symposium was closed by the remarks of Ms. KISHIMOTO-HOSONUMA Noriko, Director of International Affairs Division, Planning Department of Geospatial Information Authority of Japan.