



Side Event to the 2021 UNGEGN Session

Creating an Equal Society through Geographical Names

Wednesday 5 May 2021 at 7:30 am EDT (New York)

BACKGROUND

The UNGEGN Bureau and Secretariat invite its representatives, names experts, academics and interested stakeholders to join them on **5th May 2021 beginning at 7:30am** EDT to participate in a panel discussion on **creating an equal society through geographical names** to be held virtually on the margins of the 2021 Session.

March 2020 to present has been a spectacular, game changing period bought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, and it continues to impact every aspect of the economic, social, environmental, and political lives of countries and peoples across the world. This current viral outbreak is one of colossal proportions and the rate of infection has been able to multiply rapidly given our densely populated urban centers and an interconnected global economy. Responders worldwide – scientists, doctors, disease trackers, logisticians and supply chain experts have been designing and implementing measures to stop the transmission and spread of the virus. Critical to the response effort is the sharing of information and guidelines, the development of tools to deliver data in real time on websites and via messaging networks, identification of locations to establish additional hospitals, quarantine bases, vaccination centres, and effective communication on the situation.

In the summer of 2020, the world was again shaken with the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, USA at the hands of a police officer. This gruesome incident ignited national and global protests which called for changes in symbols of inequality and racism, and the renewed strength of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement. BLM has created momentum supporting a groundswell of change, it also became a catalyst for pro-action in geographic naming. For example, in Germany the capital Berlin has been having discussions to rename a metro station and street which had become notorious for bearing a name based on a derogatory word for Black people. Mohrenstraße (Moors Street) station is to be renamed Glinkastraße and the street is to be renamed Anton-Wilhelm-Amo-Straße after first black person to get a university degree. In the United Kingdom Sir John Hawkins Square was renamed by the Plymouth City Council to Jack Leslie Square. John Hawkins was linked to the slave trade and Jack Leslie was the only professional black footballer in England between 1921 and 1934.¹

This new wave of social consciousness should also be examined in connection with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) relating to social and gender equality, inclusivity, and diversity. When it comes to attaining a better gender balance and inclusion of minorities, it is necessary to see this in relation to UNGEGN resolution VIII/2 and also in relation to the limitations set up in this resolution.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_name_changes_due_to_the_George_Floyd_protests, Accessed 3 May 2021



The UNGEGN Bureau, in an effort to determine the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and calls for greater societal equality and inclusion such as the Black Lives Matter movement on the work being done on the standardization of geographic names in Member States, conducted a survey. As at 30 April, 2021, 30 responses were received. In order to satisfactorily address the questions under consideration, the Bureau kindly asks Member States to complete the survey, as additional data across the divisions (geographical and linguistic) is needed.

In addition, it is recognized that generally, National Names Authorities are not very proactive in identifying geographical names within their responsibility which need to be investigated and or changed. This point is supported by the data collected from the survey.

Therefore, further investigation is necessary across the names standardization community to gain a greater understanding on the impact of the pandemic and resulting calls for inclusion in place names.

OBJECTIVE

UNGEKN in pursuing its mandate is responsible for giving practical advice on taking action through geographical naming **restoration, revival** and **giving identity/voice**. Therefore, addressing the issues emanating from BLM fits within the Group of Experts current practices to discourage offensive, inappropriate, derogatory, discriminatory and frivolous geographical names. Therefore, now is the appropriate time for UNGEGN to begin this conversation and focus on this aspect of the Group's work.

The objective of this side event is to begin discussions on inclusion and creating an equal society through geographical names standardization (existing as well as new geographical names). Restoring indigenous geographical names is an important step in gaining a more inclusive society and giving identity and voice through geographical names to hitherto 'silent' groups, orientations, peoples and cultures. Geographical names are seriously and inherently imbued with power. Those who are named are in control of identity.

It is hoped that this conversation will provide experts with collective understanding followed by broad uptake of potential decisions and recommendations.

TENTATIVE AGENDA

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| 1. Opening remarks – Chair UNGEGN, Pierre Jaillard | 7:30 - 7:35 |
| 2. Introductory statement and setting the scene - Moderator, Peder Gammeltoft | 7:35 – 7:45 |
| 3. Panellists – Introduce their topic | |
| a. Carla Jack – Canada | |
| b. Tara Wallace -United States of America | 7:45 – 8:05 |
| c. Rikke Olesen - Denmark | |
| d. Annette Torensjö -Sweden | |
| 4. Panel discussion led by the Moderator | 8:05 – 8:25 |
| 5. Open discussion with questions from the virtual floor | 8:25 – 8:45 |
| 6. Wrap up and closing | 8:45 – 8:50 |



For additional information please contact Peder Gammeltoft at peder.gammeltoft@uib.no and or Cecilie Blake at blake1@un.org and please do visit the session website [UNSD — United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names](#)

Connection Details

[Please click here for connection details](#)

