

# United Nations Nations Unies

**SECRETARIAT OF UNITED NATIONS GROUP  
OF EXPERTS ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES  
UN STATISTICS DIVISION**

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Dear Colleagues,

We are now only a few days away from the start of the 2021 session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), and I am pleased to report that preparations are proceeding full speed ahead, to begin the first virtual meeting on Monday 3 May 2021, at 9:00 am eastern daylight time.

We trust that all delegations wishing to participate have been registered and your speakers have completed their onboarding session on the Interprefy platform, which took place on Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> April 2021. We are aware that the registration process for some delegations was not as smooth as was expected and we thank you for your patience and cooperation in this matter. Should you have missed your onboarding session on Interprefy, there is no need to be worried, the platform will be opened one hour prior to the scheduled start of each meeting and speakers will then be able to check their connection and equipment. In addition, to assist delegates in the use of Interprefy, guidelines were circulated in your platform connection email. These guidelines have also been uploaded to the UNGEGN 2021 session webpage on the “other documents” tab.

As you may be aware, your reports and technical papers constitute the basis of the substantive discussions during the session. As of 28 April, we have received 76 written statements for 12 agenda items. Thank you for taking the time to document your combined positions, views, questions, concerns and suggestions. All of your written statements will be uploaded on the UNGEGN website and will be part of the official records for the 2021 session and for posterity. The UNGEGN secretariat, its Bureau and Working Group Conveners have been working diligently to collate and review your statements and are preparing succinct summaries and draft decisions, to be shared with you next week during the course of the virtual session. We acknowledge that the stated deadline to submit written statements has passed. Therefore, to ensure inclusivity and allow all delegations the opportunity to contribute to the deliberations, the continued submission of your written statements is encouraged and welcomed. Please note however that these written statements will be uploaded to the session’s webpage in a gradual manner.

Given that the time to take the floor next week will be limited, we encourage delegations wishing to take the floor to advise the UNGEGN secretariat by email in advance of the meetings. In your email we kindly ask that you include the name, division and country of the speaker, and the agenda item to be addressed. In addition, we urge speakers to make their interventions succinct, focused, directly address the agenda item, and should be no more than three minutes.

Please note that you will be able to use the “chat-function” in Interprefy to express your views. We certainly expect rich participatory discussions, particularly on Friday 7 May when we will jointly review the draft report of the session. We are confident that our usual cooperative spirit toward finding consensus language to move the global geographical names standardization programme forward will prevail.

I would also like to take this opportunity to update you on a few administrative matters. During the intersessional period a few of our Bureau and Working Group Members retired. On behalf of the Group, I acknowledge the sterling contributions of Ms. Élisabeth Calvarin (France) and Mr. Leo Dillon (USA), both co-convenors of the Working Group on Country Names, who have retired and are unable to serve in their national capacities. Mr. Hasanuddin Abidin (Indonesia), Vice-Chair of UNGEGN elected in 2019, has recently resigned given competing responsibilities.

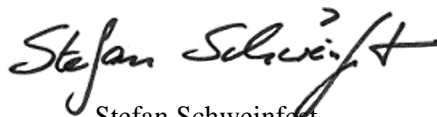
In accordance with Rule 9 (3) of the Rules of Procedure of UNGEGN, which states that “If a Vice-Chair or Rapporteur is unable to perform the functions of office, the Chair, with the support of the Group, shall appoint a member of the Group to complete the unexpired portion of the term of office.” The Chair, after consultation and having taken the advice of the members of the Bureau, appointed Ms. Susan Birtles (Australia) to replace Mr. Hasanuddin Abidin (Indonesia) as Vice-Chair for the remaining term, until the 2023 session of UNGEGN. Ms. Birtles has provided expert support in the preparation of the draft strategic plan and programme of work 2021-2019, which will be introduced for discussion and adoption during the session. We thank Ms. Birtles and the Australian Government for making her services and expertise available to the global geographical names standardization community.

We acknowledge that arrangements for this year’s UNGEGN session are very different than in previous years, and we are committed to keeping you abreast of session requirements and the latest developments. You will also find relevant practical information continually being made available on the UNGEGN website, please do consult regularly for updates.

Should you have any questions or need any assistance regarding the forthcoming UNGEGN session, please contact Ms. Cecille Blake ([blake1@un.org](mailto:blake1@un.org)) or Ms. Vilma Frani ([frani@un.org](mailto:frani@un.org)). Procedural questions should be addressed to the Secretary of the session, Mr. Irfan Soomro ([soomroi@un.org](mailto:soomroi@un.org)), with copy to Mr. Vincent Wilkinson ([wilkinsonv@un.org](mailto:wilkinsonv@un.org)).

While my staff and I cannot welcome you this year into our UN home, given the challenging circumstances, we are looking forward to joining together around the world for the 2021 session; and then, hopefully meet in person for the third session in 2023.

Yours sincerely,



Stefan Schweinfest  
Director

UNEGN Secretariat  
United Nations Statistics Division/DESA