

**Informal Paper (English only)**

**United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names  
2023 session**

**Agenda item 17, Presentation and adoption of decisions**

**New York, 1-5 May 2023**

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**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) Commends the achievements and the ongoing work of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names on the standardization of geographical names and its contribution to the management and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals, and decides to support cooperation between the Group of Experts and United Nations Maps.

**Recommendation 2**

The Economic and Social Council:

- (a) Decides that the appropriate working groups of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (i.e. the Working Groups on Geographical Names Data Management, Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage and Romanization Systems) shall work to populate the World Geographical Names Database to ensure toponyms are accurately reflected across all languages, including those with non-Roman alphabets or scripts, to strengthen relationships, links and connections in geographical names standardization, and in this regard, requests:

- i. the mobilisation of resources to support the integration of other toponymic datasets in the Database, including those pertaining to culture, heritage and identity.
- ii. a report that explores the role of semantic web technologies in the context of the World Geographical Names Database and provides recommendations, where appropriate, to the Group of Experts at its 2025 session for consideration.
- iii. the United Nations Statistics Division and the Geospatial Information Section of the Office of Information Communication

Technology to work with the Group of Experts through its Bureau and working groups to review existing data within the World Geographical Names Database and work with Member States to resolve linguistic, geographical and other data quality issues.

## **B. Decisions brought to the attention of the Council**

2. The following decisions adopted by the Group of Experts are brought to the attention of the Council:

### **Decision 3/2023/1**

#### **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 United Nations Statistics Division in arranging and preparing for the 2023 session;
- (c) Encouraged the adoption of good practices of the Group of Experts in order to advance the integration of the Strategic Plan over the next six years, such as the prioritization of work products and recording of all the Group's strategies and actions in the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029, grounding decisions in the principles of the United Nations and further mobilization of the linguistic/geographic divisions as well as all stakeholders.

### **Decision 3/2023/2**

#### **Report of the Secretariat**

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Expressed appreciation for the report of the Secretariat and its call to strengthen the operations and work of the Group of Experts;
- (b) Noted the Secretariat suggested an approach to address the review of the working groups and committed to further discussion on providing guidance on how this exercise may be efficiently conducted;
- (c) Welcomed the model national report submitted by the East Central and South-East Europe Division;
- (d) Called for organisation of an appropriate framework to support the strengthening and or creation of national names authorities as well as an UNGEGN trust fund.

### **Decision 3/2023/3**

#### **National Reports**

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Took note of the reports submitted by 51 countries and expressed appreciation for the thematic consideration of those reports in the form of a national dialogue addressed throughout the session;
- (b) Also noted that the reports covered themes including national names standardization processes, cultural aspects of geographical names such as Indigenous and minority names, technology and toponymic databases, promotion and training on geographical names and collaboration between two or more Member States and with academia, the presentations engendering wide-ranging discussion and concluded with a call to consider greater work emphasis on topics such as crowd sourcing and data validation;
- (c) Encouraged experts to refer to the full national reports to use as a guide to inform on topics of common interest in national geographical names standardization.

### **Decision 3/2023/4**

#### **Activities on the standardization of geographical names in Africa**

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Took note of the report submitted by the Coordinator of the Task Team for Africa and expressed appreciation for the continued activity of the Task Team, despite the impacts of the pandemic;
- (b) Also noted a well-attended meeting with lively debate in Addis Ababa in October 2022, stressing the importance of standardization of geographical names and expressing the desire to revitalize existing structures or to create new ones for countries that do not yet have them;
- (c) Recognised that the Task Team for Africa decided to promote and elevate the already existing Sub-Working Group on Standardization of Geographical Names in Africa into a Group on the same level as the other four existing Groups of the Regional Committee of the United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for Africa;
- (d) Acknowledged the long history of the Task Team for Africa, and its regular meetings and active partnerships, however also noting that many African countries have still to establish geographical names management structures;
- (e) Regretted the relatively small number of African states represented at this 2023 session.

### **Decision 3/2023/5**

#### **Monitoring and evaluation of the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work, 2021-2029, and of the work of the Group of Experts**

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Welcomed the report and the work of the Bureau and working group convenors in the implementation of the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029 during the two years since its adoption, affirming the need to continue to contribute to its implementation in order to ensure its success;
- (b) Reaffirmed that the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029 would continue as a guiding framework of the Group of Experts and for geographical names standardization of the Member States;
- (c) Supported the adoption of the amendments 2-iii-10, 5-ii-3, 1-i-5, 2-i-5, 3-iii-10 and 5-i-1, in the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029 proposed by the Bureau;
- (d) Agreed to consider and express views on priorities to be made in the implementation of the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029;
- (e) Encouraged Member States to align their standardization activities to the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029.

### **Decision 3/2023/6**

#### **Reports of the Divisions**

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Took note of the report of the Bureau and Secretariat of the Group of Experts, and the reports submitted by divisions;
- (b) Acknowledged the need expressed by some divisions for more support from the Bureau and the Secretariat, including space on the website to archive divisional matters;
- (c) Adopted the guideline ‘Responsibilities of Divisional Chairs and Executive Group’;
- (d) Encouraged Member States to participate in divisional activities and to revitalize inactive divisions;
- (e) Encouraged the divisions to actively contribute to the implementation of the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029 on the strategies and related actions as outlined in ‘Table 4 Strategic Plan and Programme of Work - work items relevant to Divisions’ of the report of the Bureau and Secretariat.

### **Decision 3/2023/7**

#### **National and international meetings and conferences**

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Took note of the reports and acknowledged the efforts demonstrated by these meetings and conferences.

### **Decision 3/2023/8**

#### **Cooperation and liaison with other international organizations**

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Welcomed and noted the reports on liaison with other organizations;
- (b) Reaffirmed the importance of relationships between the Group of Experts and the organizations with which it maintains liaison;
- (c) Noted the invitation to the Group extended by the Joint International Cartographic Association/International Geographical Union Commission on Toponymy to join the Commission;
- (d) Calls upon the International Council of Onomastic Sciences to report on the proceedings of its 2024 Congress;
- (e) Endorsed the International Principles and Procedures for Antarctic Place Names, noted with appreciation the contribution of United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names experts to this document, and encouraged the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR)-member nations to use them;
- (f) Supported further cooperation with the United Nations Geospatial network and United Nations Maps (UN Maps) and in this regard urges:
  - i. that the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names explore a collaboration with the UN Maps programme on geographical names, led by the United Nations Geospatial Information Section of the Office of Information and Communications Technology, as a means to operationalize the work and knowledge of Group of Experts through the delivery of various mandates of the United Nations System;
  - ii. that the United Nations Geospatial Network of the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management and appropriate representatives of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names establish an appropriate mechanism to promote the work and importance of the Group of Experts and geographical names to the United Nations system, in particular by highlighting the important role of the geographical names theme, one of the global fundamental geospatial data themes;
- (g) Recognized the activities and progress that the International Hydrographic Organization had achieved in naming undersea and maritime features and encouraged national names authorities to submit proposals of undersea feature names to the International Hydrographic

Organization/Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Subcommittee on Undersea Feature Names and to promote the work of undersea feature names standardization within their respective programmes of work.

### **Decision 3/2023/9**

#### **Cooperation and liaison with the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management**

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Took note of two reports on strengthening collaboration with the Committee of Experts;
- (b) Recognized that the Committee of Experts had acknowledged and supported the proposal to collaborate on the development of a compendium of institutional arrangements on shared good practices for geographical names standardization between national mapping and geospatial agencies and national names authorities, to increase cooperation, create synergies and share knowledge and good practices for the standardization of geographical names;
- (c) Welcomed the offer from Indonesia to assist with developing a compendium of good practices between the Group of Experts and Committee of Experts at the national level.

### **Decision 3/2023/10**

#### **National and international standardization of geographical names:**

**names collection, office treatment, national authorities, features beyond a single sovereignty and international cooperation;**

#### **Toponymic guidelines for map and other editors for international use**

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Noted the reports and welcomed the interesting exploration of issues and achievements emerging in the range of national standardization programmes;
- (b) Encouraged experts to continue developments in naming principles and procedures to their geographical context and report them to the Group of Experts;
- (c) Welcomed the recent updates to the inventory of toponymic guidelines and their dissemination through the United Nations Group of Experts website, recognizing the reference value of the guidelines to the Group of Experts;
- (d) Encouraged Member States to prepare new or update existing guidelines and report to the subsequent sessions of the Group of Experts.

### **Decision 3/2023/11**

#### **Social and economic benefits, supporting sustainable development, measures taken and proposed for the implementation of resolutions**

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Welcomed the reports and expressed appreciation for the breadth of information made available, such as benefits of names standardization in case of disaster response, establishing naming and renaming principles, legislative requirements for public participation, and resolution of a disputed case;
- (b) Appreciated the progress made by the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation on the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029, motivating the implementation of resolutions and recommendations, and maintaining and updating the multilingual database for resolutions and recommendations with the technical support of the National Geographic Information Institute of the Republic of Korea;
- (c) Supported the proposed change from working group convenor to a coordinator for the functions that continue to be needed;
- (d) Supported the suggestion that the Bureau and the United Nations Statistics Division enable the collection of procedural guidelines for national naming authorities and that they publish guidelines that include approaches to geographical name changes.

### **Decision 3/2023/12**

#### **Issues of publicity for the Group of Experts and funding of Group projects**

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Took note of the report and appreciated the work of the Working Group on Publicity and Funding during the intersessional period in raising awareness;
- (b) Welcomed the publication of themed issues of the UNGEGN Bulletin, and called for the continued identification of themes relevant to geographical names standardization;
- (c) Encouraged further exploration on creating a Group of Experts trust fund to be used to support the participation of developing countries and to conduct toponymic training events;
- (d) Noted with regret the stepping down of the current working group convenor.

### **Decision 3/2023/13**

#### **Toponymic Education**

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Took note of the reports and welcomed the developments in online training courses in toponymy developed by the Group of Experts;

- (b) Noted the good practices of Member States supporting each other in geographical names standardization capacity building and training initiatives at regional, bilateral and national levels and encouraged the continuation of these efforts;
- (c) Supported efforts to restore, empower, promote and preserve geographical names of indigenous heritage by making them available as spatial datasets;
- (d) Noted with interest the suggestion to explore with the Unicode Consortium adding missing characters to the Unicode character set;
- (e) Welcomed the upcoming training course on toponymy in Bali, Indonesia, for the Asia South-East Division and encouraged Member States to submit requests for training to the Working Group on Training Courses in Toponymy.

### **Decision 3/2023/14**

#### **Toponymic Terminology**

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Took note of the reports, expressed appreciation for the preparation of glossaries of geographical terms, and encouraged such reports in future sessions;
- (b) Requested Member States to continue to suggest, and the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology to address, proposals for additions, modifications, and corrections to the database of toponymic terminology;
- (c) Endorsed the Working Group's recommendations for additions and changes to the terminology database.

### **Decision 3/2023/15**

#### **Geographical names as culture, heritage and identity, including indigenous, minority and regional languages and multilingual issues**

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Took note of the reports and appreciated the wide range of topics shared, including map products, regulations, best practice for indigenous naming, derogatory names, and world heritage sites, indigenous and minority language names, commercial and commemorative naming, legislation, and policies and best practices;
- (b) Supported the continuation of the sharing of national experiences and engagement, especially noting the increased attention by the Group of Experts on the importance of all cultural heritage matters;
- (c) Acknowledged the Group's collective raised awareness of the emotional and spiritual aspects of cultural heritage in geographical naming, which offer improved connection, identity and belonging, contributing to equitable recognition of indigenous geographical names.



### **Decision 3/2023/16**

#### **Exonyms**

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Took note of the reports and reaffirmed decision 2/2021/12 on Exonyms taken at its 2021 session;
- (b) Decided that there is a need to issue a recommendation for consideration at the 2025 session of the Group of Experts, that reconciles the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names' resolutions on exonyms and its acknowledgement of exonyms as part of cultural heritage, and that the Working Group on Exonyms continue further discussions towards achieving this;
- (c) Appreciated the work and deliberation on exonyms conducted by the experts during and subsequent to the Working Group meeting in Ljubljana, Slovenia in 2022.

### **Decision 3/2023/17**

#### **Report of the Secretariat – World Geographical Names Database**

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Welcomed the report of the Secretariat and commended the redevelopment of the World Geographical Names Database as a global repository of toponymic data that will help raise awareness and promote the use of national standardized names on maps and in documents;
- (b) Urged Member States to contribute to the Database to ensure toponyms are accurately reflected across all languages, including those with non-Roman alphabets or scripts, to strengthen relationships, links and connections in geographical names standardization;
- (c) Welcomed the support of its Working Group on Geographical Names Data Management to consider an appropriate data governance mechanism with the Secretariat, and in this regard:
  - i. welcomed the concept of a unique and standardised identifier for cities and other geographical features within the Database, and
  - ii. requested the United Nations Statistics Division, within available resources, to enhance the functionality and data within the Database;
- (d) In recognition of the potential value of incorporating semantic web technologies to link the database to a broader data ecosystem, called for the relevant working groups and the United Nations Statistics Division to explore ways to further enhance the Database's capabilities to support linked open data applications and advance the use of authoritative, multi-lingual geographical names across multiple data platforms;
- (e) Welcomed the offers of assistance in terms of data and support and in this regard urged greater mobilisation of resources to support the

integration of other toponymic datasets in the Database, including those pertaining to culture, heritage and identity.

### **Decision 3/2023/18**

#### **Geographical names data management**

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Welcomed the information made available, the active participation and the efforts undertaken by Member States to inform about and enhance geographical names data management;
- (b) Took note of the reports and affirmed the support for the Strategic Plan and the Programme of Work 2021-2029, Strategy 1 – Technical Expertise, outlined for the Working Group on Geographical Names Data Management for the period 2023-2025 and the willingness of Member States to participate and contribute to the action items identified within the Programme of Work;
- (c) Re-affirmed that linked data is another stage in the evolution of data management methodologies of the Group of Experts;
- (d) Encouraged Member States to:
  - i. consider linked data in their approaches to geographical names standardization, and
  - ii. contribute further to the monitoring of the availability of free, easily accessible, and authorized data on digital geographical names;
- (e) Requested the Working Group to continue to facilitate collaboration and workshops on technical issues between national names authorities and practitioners in order to provide practical guidance on organizational and technical issues and processes;
- (f) Requested the Working Group to further coordinate the monitoring of the availability of free, easily accessible and authorized data on digital geographical names;
- (g) Requested the Working Group to take action on the publication of the content and invite standardization bodies to provide input and comments on the ideas presented on:
  - i. geospatial information sharing, accessibility and dissemination related standards, and
  - ii. specific issues related to geographical names data modelling.

### **Decision 3/2023/19**

#### **Writing systems and pronunciation**

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Welcomed the report, acknowledged the outstanding contribution of a co-Convenor's 25 years' service, and noted with regret his intention to stand down from the convenorship;
- (b) Agreed to continue to investigate innovative methods to be used for romanization;
- (c) Noted the work on transliteration between non-Roman script writing systems and encouraged Member States to continue such projects;
- (d) Encouraged all Member States to continue to share ongoing work with the Working Group on Romanization Systems towards further implementation of existing United Nations romanization systems and towards adoption of new national systems.

### **Decision 3/2023/20**

#### **Other geographical names issues**

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Took note of the reports and adopted the updated Group of Experts list of country names;
- (b) Decided to replace the Working Group on Country Names with a Coordinator to update the list of country names;
- (c) Noted the stepping down of the current acting chair of the Asia East Division (other than China), and that his interest in establishing a language-based division in Asia (shared writing system of Chinese characters) will be passed on to his successor.

### **Decision 3/2023/21**

#### **The future of the Working Group on Publicity and Funding and the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation**

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Supported the disbanding of the Working Group on Publicity and Funding and of the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation;
- (b) Welcomed the transfer of Publicity to the newly formed Coordinator for Evaluation and Implementation, under the name Coordinator for Evaluation, Implementation and Publicity;
- (c) Acknowledged the transfer of the work on Funding to the Working Group on Training Courses in Toponymy.

### **Decision 3/2023/22**

#### **Strengthening relationships, links and connections**

The Group of Experts:

- (a) Welcomed the theme of its 2023 Session, ‘Strengthening relationships, links and connections in geographical names standardization and for sustainable development and pandemic recovery’;
- (b) Also welcomed the convening of the panel discussion with the same theme, noting with appreciation the interests and diverse viewpoints expressed by five panelists;
- (c) Recognized that strengthening relationships, links and connections between the Group of Experts and other actors related to geographical names, including national naming authorities, bodies of the United Nations, scientific, technical and academic groups, and private map-makers or map-users, would increase the capacity to achieve sustainable development goals and aid recovery from the pandemic, but also that there were restrictions and barriers;
- (d) Requested the Bureau and relevant Working Groups to take measures to find organized ways of sharing expertise on geographical names standardization and proper dissemination and correct use of standardized geographical names.