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**Opening Remarks
2023 Session of the United Nations Group of Experts
on Geographical Names
1 May 2023**

Excellencies,
Chair of the Group of Experts on Geographical Names,
Members of the UNGEGN Bureau,
Distinguished Experts,
Colleagues,

I am delighted to be with you at this 2023 session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names and am particularly honoured to deliver the opening remarks on behalf of the Under-Secretary-General of DESA, Junhua Li.

The theme for your 2023 session “Strengthening relationships, links and connections in geographical names standardization and for sustainable development and pandemic recovery” is not only aligned to the theme of the 2023 ECOSOC High-level Political Forum on sustainable development, in particular goal 17 – Partnerships for the goals, but also to UNGEGN's Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029, Strategy 2: Relationships, links and connections. Good relationships, links and connections are fundamental to all of UNGEGN's strategies and are at the heart of the work of the United Nations.

With 2023 marking the mid-point of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the July 2023 HLPF will make a key contribution to prepare for the SDG Summit to be held in September 2023 during the high-level week of the General Assembly. The Summit will bring together Heads of State and Government to carry out a comprehensive review of the state of the SDG's, respond to the impact of the multiple and interlocking crises facing the world, and provide political guidance on transformative and accelerated actions to achieve the goals by 2030. Therefore, this is a year of reflection, and review. It offers opportunities for overcoming challenges, to seek common solutions, recommit to multilateralism, to reverse negative trends and shift towards rapid SDG progress.

Successfully implementing the 2030 Agenda and achieving a more resilient world will require strong global solidarity, scaled-up international and regional cooperation, strengthened data collection and analysis systems, and the forging of innovative partnerships with multiple

stakeholders to support national efforts. Geographical names underpin data collection, monitoring and analysis and therefore are undoubtedly necessary for managing and monitoring the SDG's.

Distinguished Experts,

UNDESA is aware that supporting geographical names standardization at the national level is a key mandate of the Group of Experts. We are also aware of the good work that has been done over the Group's rich history to increase the level of geographical names standardization globally. In this regard we welcome experts to this session and note that key priority areas such as, place names supporting sustainable development, toponymic data management and gazetteers, romanization systems, diversity and inclusion, capacity building in toponymy and geographical names as cultural heritage will be addressed.

We will continue to bring experts and stakeholders together for transformative and impactful actions to achieve not only the objectives set out in your Strategic Plan and Programme of Work for 2021-2029, but also the targets set out in the SDGs, and the 2030 Agenda as a whole. Your actions, discussions and decisions can help to make our goals and targets possible.

Distinguished Experts,

UNDESA stands ready to support you, and we hope this 2023 session will inspire you and facilitate further progress. I do look forward to learning about your session decisions and more on the impact of your work. I wish you productive deliberations and a successful 2023 session. Thank you for having me.