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English

United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names

2023 session

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Item 3 of the provisional agenda *

Reports of the Chair and the Secretariat

World Geographical Names Database

Note by the secretariat

The secretariat of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) has the honour of bringing to the attention of the Group of Experts the present report on its activities and progress in the redevelopment of the World Geographical Names Database. The Group of Experts is invited to review the report, and express its views on the work done to redesign and recreate a robust web-based geographical names database to support the management and dissemination of geographic names.

Summary **

The UNGEGN World Geographical Names Database is a repository of the short and full names of countries (193 UN member states and two non-Member States observers), their capitals, and major cities (with population over 100,000) in a multilingual, multi-scriptural and geo-referenced format. Authoritative city endonyms are provided mainly by national name authorities and sound files are being added to assist users with pronunciation. To date, the Database contains toponyms, endonyms, and exonyms of features detailing over 2,700 country names, some 6,100 names for 3,362 cities, with more than 970 audio files.

* GEGN.2/2023/1

** The full report was prepared by the UNGEGN Secretariat. The report will be available under document symbol GEGN.2/2023/111/CRP.111, in the language of submission only, at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/sessions/3rd_session_2023/.

The development of the Database is guided by UNGEGN's mandated decisions. The first iteration of the Database was built after 2007. Due to challenges around the technology used to manage the data provided to the Group of Experts, this iteration of the Database was closed in 2019. In response, the secretariat mobilized surplus resources from other information technology projects within the 2020 budgetary year to revive the Database utilizing modern web technologies and adhering to the prevailing technological guidelines of the United Nations.

At its 2021 session, the Group of Experts adopted decision 2/2021/2 (E/2021/69), which "appreciated the work done by the secretariat in maintaining the website of the Group of Experts and reviving the online World Geographical Names database, noted that the completion of those modifications and access to the database as soon as possible would be of great benefit". Moreover, the development of the Database has been conducted to ensure alignment with the principles of the Secretary-General's Data Strategy and compliance with the prevailing environment of publishing maps and web-applications within the United Nations ([ST/AI/189](#)).

The full report details the activities of the secretariat in reviving the Database, including: reviewing the functionality of the Database; discussing the technological approach taken; examining the developmental journey of the Database to ensure its compliance with prevailing guidelines, norms, and geospatial standards of both the Group of Experts and the United Nations; providing a set of recommendations for improving geographic coverage of the database, including through engaging Member States to provide toponymic data and through the integration of other forms of authoritative data, such as from the United Nations Demographic Yearbook. The report also features a discussion that considers the future expansion of the Database, to include features such as a mechanism that enables the Group of Experts to work on the nexus of linked data and geographic names, and the toponyms of indigenous and other geographies.