

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

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**International Symposium on the Standardization of
Geographical Names**

**- Introducing the Efforts and Contributions by
UNGEKN and Japan**

Submitted by Japan **

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** Prepared by Geospatial Information Authority of Japan

International Symposium on the Standardization of Geographical Names

—Introducing the Efforts and Contributions by UNGEGN and Japan—

On 30 March 2023, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA) and Geospatial Information Authority of Japan (GSI) co-hosted “International Symposium on the Standardization of Geographical Names—Introducing the Efforts and Contributions by UNGEGN and Japan” with the participation of Mr. Pierre JAILLARD, Chair of UNGEGN, and many Japanese experts on geographical names. At the symposium, the experts made presentations and the participants actively discussed the technical perspectives on geographical names, and it enhanced the participants’ understanding on the efforts and contributions of UNGEGN and Japan regarding geographical names.

At the beginning of the symposium, Mr. MATSUI Shinji, Director of Specialized Agencies Division (MOFA) made the opening remarks. In his remarks, Mr. MATSUI emphasized the significance of the standardization of geographical names by pointing out that it contributes to the UN activities including in the areas of PKO and disaster management as well as the promotion of SDGs, on which Japan has been putting primary importance in addressing global issues. He also mentioned UNGEGN’s important role as a forum for technical discussions, and reiterated Japan’s respect towards the technical and academic nature of UNGEGN. Moreover, he stated that Japan has been supporting UNGEGN’s aim to promote discussion on the standardization of geographical names through technical contributions, and when there were any actions to undermine this UNGEGN’s nature, aim and constant efforts, Japan has been making its coherent efforts to encourage UNGEGN to adhere its technical mandate, for the benefit of all UNGEGN members and the international community as a whole. Mr. MATSUI concluded his remarks by thanking Japanese experts including Dr. TANABE Hiroshi, Chair of Asia East Division, and Dr. WATANABE Kohei for their presence, leadership and valuable contributions in UNGEGN, and by expressing his expectations for active and fruitful discussion among the participants in the symposium.

Dr. TAKAGI Akihiko, Professor Emeritus of Kyushu University, reported on the activities of the sub-committee on geographical names of the Science Council of Japan. The sub-committee was established in 2015 to discuss geographical names in Japan, mainly from an academic perspective. After deepening discussions within the sub-committee and through public symposiums, a report titled “Current Status and Issues of Geographical Name Standardization” was published in 2019. Dr. TAKAGI also noted that the discussions are ongoing with the issues such as the standardization of geographical names in Japan, confusion over conversions from foreign geographical names to Japanese notations and strengthening cooperation between various organizations related to place names and academic organizations. He concluded his remarks by referring to the need for academic organizations in Japan to further strengthen their response to UNGEGN and to promote cooperation between industry, academia, and government.

Mr. HAYASAKA Hisato, GSI, gave a presentation about GSI’s efforts on multilingual maps. He gave a basic introduction to the multilingual webmap, which was experimentally released in 2020, the background of its development, how to convert Japanese to English, French, Korean, Chinese and romanized Japanese, and efficient annotation display using vector tile technology. He also reported on overcoming the major challenge of establishing a system to update multilingual webmap in conjunction with constantly updated Digital Japan Basic Map with Japanese annotation.

Mr. Pierre JAILLARD, Chair of UNGEGN, gave a Keynote Presentation about the overview of UNGEGN’s activities. He stated that UNGEGN’s efforts in geographical names are to unify the direction of discussion around exonyms and to make government authorities aware of geographical name issues through further cooperation with the United Nations. He introduced that the concept of “certain exonyms are living and vital elements of the language” has been increasingly recognized. It has promoted the discussions on exonyms, and has led to the establishment of guidelines in 2021 that will reconcile the UNGEGN’s previous resolutions on exonym with the recognition of exonyms as part of

cultural heritage. He noted that discussions are underway to develop a list of "traditional exonyms" that should be protected.

He also explained that following the merger of UNGEGN and UNCSGN in 2017 with the aim of strengthening cooperation with ECOSOC and other UN agencies, UNGEGN has been explaining and illustrating how geographic name standardization can contribute to the broader goals of the UN in a variety of settings and raising awareness among a wide range of participants of the value of its activities.

Through the keynote speeches as well as the active exchange of opinions with Mr. JAILLARD, the participants seemed to deepen their understanding of UNGEGN's efforts and challenges.

Following the Chair's Keynote Presentation and Q&A, Dr. WATANABE Kohei, Professor of Teikyo University, gave a presentation on the history and activities of the UNGEGN Working Group on Exonyms. Based on the UNCSGN resolution, the mission given to the WG was to reduce exonyms when it was established in 2002, but as a result of discussions on the definition and typology of exonyms, which evolved into discussions on the cultural heritage aspects of geographical names, Dr. WATANABE explained that discussions are currently underway to revise the original resolution in light of the cultural heritage aspects of exonyms and the importance of geographical names in each language. Dr. WATANABE also introduced that at the last meeting it was agreed to review the past resolution.

After the presentations by the participants, Dr. WATANABE moderated a discussion session, and it turned out to be a very lively one. A question-and-answer session based on the participants' presentations was held, and a frank exchange of opinions took place on UNGEGN's past efforts and the challenges it faces.

The symposium was closed by the remarks of Dr. TANABE, who re-emphasized the importance of promoting efforts to standardize geographical names in Japan with the cooperation of UNGEGN.