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English

**United Nations Group of Experts On
Geographical Names
2023 session
New York, 1 – 5 May 2023
Agenda item 3 of the provisional agenda *
Report of the Chair and the Secretariat**

Report of the Secretariat

Submitted by the UNGEGN Secretariat **

Summary

In keeping with the practice of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names and in accordance with the draft agenda approved by the Economic and Social Council in its decision 2018/264, and pursuant to the resolutions and decisions adopted at the Eleventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names and the thirtieth session of the Group of Experts, the Secretariat has prepared a report detailing the activities undertaken by the Group of Experts during the intersessional period. The Group of Experts is invited to review the report and to provide comments.

At its 2021 session, held virtually from 3 to 7 May 2021, the Group of Experts adopted decision 2/2021/2, in which it welcomed the Secretariat's report and thanked the Statistics Division for its continued valuable and unfaltering support to the Group, which enabled the strategic plan and programme of work 2021–2029 to come to fruition. The Group of Experts appreciated the work done by the Secretariat in maintaining the website and reviving the online World Geographical Names database and encouraged Member States to supply their authorized data and sound files and/or to update their existing information. Furthermore, the Group noted and supported the recommendations of the Secretariat to further strengthen the operations of the Group of Experts, which included, convening regular virtual meetings of the Bureau and the Chairs of its 24 linguistic and geographical divisions, identifying resources to be used to develop e-learning toponymy platforms to sustain its capacity-development offering, creating a working group on national names standardization, which could incorporate the Task Team for Africa and identifying officers to fill vacant positions and designing succession planning strategies.

* [GEGN.2/2023/1](#).

** Prepared by the UNGEGN Secretariat

The full report provides a summary of the major activities conducted by the Group of Experts, with the support of the Secretariat, during the intersessional period from May 2021 to March 2023, to progress the important work of promoting the standardization of geographical names. In the report, the Secretariat highlights the major activities conducted pursuant to recommendations made and decisions adopted at the 2021 session, and also highlights relevant tasks, as outlined in the strategic plan and programme of work.

In its report, the Secretariat highlights the work undertaken in the following areas: (a) strengthening the operations of the Group of Experts through regular strategic meetings of the Bureau, the expanded Bureau (Chairs of the working groups and Chairs of the task teams), and the Bureau and the Chairs of the divisions; (b) publicity and awareness-raising activities, including maintaining and upgrading the Group's web pages; (c) supporting capacity development initiatives, such as webinars; (d) strengthening relations with the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management and other United Nations entities (the proposed collaborative project with the Committee of Experts will be presented in a separate working paper); (e) redevelopment and deployment of the World Geographical Names Database (to be reported on in full in a separate report); (f) supporting the participation of the Group of Experts in activities of the Economic and Social Council; and (g) coordinating preparations for the 2023 session of the Group of Experts. The Secretariat also provides an outline of existing challenges and tenders possible options and recommendations for consideration by the Group of Experts.

I. Introduction

1. This report summarizes the major activities accomplished by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) Secretariat during the intersessional period May 2021 to April 2023. The UNGEGN Secretariat of the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (ECCOSOC), continues to provide the support required to progress the important work of promoting the standardization of geographical names. The report highlights the major activities conducted in pursuance of recommendations and decisions of the 2021/2nd session held virtually from 3 to 7 May 2021. In addition, this report also looks at existing challenges and tender possible options and recommendations for consideration by the Group of Experts.

II. Strengthening Operations of the Group of Experts

Meetings of the Bureau, Expanded Bureau, and Geographic/Linguistic Divisions

2. What is the purpose of meetings? The convening of meetings has mixed reviews; a successful meeting will depend on its duration, purpose, the subjects addressed, the type and format, and most important if the right persons are present, among other factors. Notwithstanding these features, effective meetings are a strong form of communication within teams, they also should improve productivity as they provide the space for feedback and keep participants on course for projects. Meetings provide the forum for the sharing of ideas, for making decisions, solving challenges and also allowing team members to build relationships and connections.

3. Over the intersessional period the UNGEGN Secretariat planned and convened a total of 17 meetings aimed at strengthening relations among the bodies that constitute UNGEGN's architecture, to work towards achieving UNGEGN's work objectives as set out in its Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029, while building awareness and capacities of its members. There were three sets of meetings, i) there were seven core Bureau meetings, ii) seven expanded Bureau meetings (consisting of the core Bureau and Working Group Convenors and Task Team Chairs) and iii) three core Bureau and Chairs of Linguistic/Geographical Division meetings. Table 1 shows the dates of 17 meetings convened from July 2021 to April 2023. The number of meetings convened during this intersessional period remained the same as the previous intersessional period 2019-2021, with exception to the additional three Core Bureau and Divisional meetings.

4. Core Bureau and Division meetings were introduced with the objectives of engaging divisional leadership, and to listen and learn of their geographical names standardizations concerns and requirements. In addition, these meetings sought to begin the process of identifying strategies, priorities and actions relevant to addressing specific divisional organizational and operational issues, revitalization of inactive divisions and strengthening their involvement and contribution to implementing the UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029.

5. The main focus of the bureau and working group meetings were the implementation of the UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029, a review of UNGEGN working groups, addressing operational and management issues, contributing to the UN Sustainable Development, 2030 Agenda and collaborating with ECOSOC and its relevant subsidiary bodies, such as the UN Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) and prepare for the 2023/third UNGEGN session.

	Date of Meeting	Meeting Type
1	9 July 2021	Expanded Bureau
2	8 October 2021	Expanded Bureau
3	19 November 2021	Core Bureau and Divisions
4	11 February 2022	Core Bureau
5	11 March 2022	Core Bureau
6	25 March 2022	Expanded Bureau
7	29 April 2022	Core Bureau
8	24 June 2022	Expanded Bureau
9	26 August 2022	Core Bureau
10	23 September 2022	Expanded Bureau
11	21 October 2022	Core Bureau
12	18 November 2022	Expanded
13	9 December 2022	Core Bureau and Divisions
14	27 January 2023	Expanded Bureau
15	3 March 2023	Core Bureau
16	30 March 2023	Core Bureau and Divisions
17	11 April 2023	Core Bureau

Table 1 UNGEGN Bureau/management meetings 2021 to 2023

Review of Working Groups

6. Reference is made to Recommendations 1 (c) and (d) of the report of UNGEGN on its 2021 session (E/2021/69), which approved the adoption of the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029 and provided the mandate for the Bureau of the Group of Experts to assess its structure of subsidiary bodies to allow for efficiency in the implementation of the strategic plan and programme of work, and if needed, propose its reorganization. The UNGEGN Secretariat notes the efforts and the actions taken by the Bureau during the intersessional period to begin the review of the existing working groups. While this effort is noteworthy, the Secretariat would wish to encourage the Bureau to consider adopting a more structured, inclusive and transparent approach, that is evidenced based. The process may begin with an initial overall concept and plan of action/road map, followed by an introduction and consultation meeting with the Chairs of the working groups and task team leads, informing of

the exercise and agreeing on a proposed approach, timelines and deliverables needed to conduct the exercise.

7. Consideration may be given to adopting the review approach used by ECOSOC over the period October 2021 to July 2022, when it conducted the review of its subsidiary bodies and their contribution to the work of ECOSOC, the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) and the 2030 Agenda. The review process consisted of information sharing meetings, briefing sessions, self-assessments, bilateral meetings with stakeholders, formal and informal consultations and meetings to review and present outcomes at each stage of the exercise. See [the road map of the review process](#). Additional information on the ECOSOC review of its subsidiary bodies is available here <https://www.un.org/ecosoc/en/content/ecosoc-subsidiary-bodies>

8. The successful implementation of the UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029 is predicated on having the relevant subsidiary bodies to support its work. Therefore, UNGEGN's existing architecture and subsidiary bodies should be reviewed and if needed, amendments or changes presented to the Group of Experts for consideration and approval.

III. Publicity and Awareness

9. The UNGEGN Secretariat with the support of the UNGEGN Expanded Bureau and the Working Group on Publicity and Funding continues to implement publicity and awareness raising activities. These include the preparation and publishing of the UNGEGN Bulletin, maintaining the UNGEGN website, and management of a Twitter account. Table two provides a summary on the Bulletins issued over the intersessional period. The bulletin serves as the main source of informing and communicating with UNGEGN Member States, and its wider community of stakeholders who are interested in the standardization of geographical names.

Bulletin No.	Date of Issue	Theme	No. Articles Contributed		
			Member States	Divisions	Working Groups
60	Special 2021	Special 2021 Session Edition	-	-	-
61	June 2021	Minority Names and Geographical Names in a Multilingual setting	9	0	0
62	November 2021	Geographical Names in an Urban Environment	5	3	0
63	June 2022	Geographical Names as Indicator of the Environment	11	1	1
64	November 2022	Making Geographical Names Data Accessible	7	1	2
Totals			32	5	3

Table 2 UNGEGN Bulletin - dates, themes and number of articles submitted by Member States and Divisions.

10. Beginning in the November 2021, issue 62 of the Bulletin, a column has been included which features updates and information on the implementation of the UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029. There was a slight fall in the number of articles submitted by Member States to the Bulletin for the current reporting period, in comparison to the figures reported in 2021. Member States had submitted 37 articles up to November 2020, as compared to 32 at the end of November 2022. The number of divisional articles remained the same, at five for the last two reporting periods. It is hoped that with the convening of Bureau and Divisional meetings there will be an increase in the number of Divisional articles published in the Bulletin.

11. Member States, divisions and working groups are encouraged to contribute articles to the Bulletin. The representative of Cyprus is once again recognized for his unwavering support to the UNGEGN Bulletin, not only with his well-written and informative articles, but also for designing the cover of all four Bulletins issued within the reporting period. Between 22 April 2021 and 11 April 2023, 118 requests for the Bulletin were submitted by 63 countries via the on-line request form.

The UNGEGN World Geographical Names Database

12. During the intersessional period the UNSD conducted a project to redevelop the UNGEGN World Geographic Names Database and web application. Over this time several countries changed their names and given the technical issues being experienced the database could not be updated. Details on this exercise and future plans for managing and maintaining the database have been provided in (GEGN.2/2023/111/CRP.111)

IV. Supporting Capacity Development

13. Notwithstanding its shrinking budget and financial constraints, the UNSD continues to support UNGEGN's capacity development training workshops, the preparation of training and publicity material and sponsors the participation of four to five experts to UNGEGN sessions.

14. The UNSD had scheduled the support of a one-week toponymic training session in Bali, Indonesia for the Asia South-East Division in 2020. This training intervention was postponed given the COVID-19 pandemic. After two postponements the training is back on schedule, to be held from the 19 to 23 June 2023 in Bali, Indonesia, and is being jointly coordinated by the Indonesian Geospatial Information Agency (Badan Informasi Geospasial), the UNSD, and the UNGEGN Working Group on Training Courses in Toponymy.

15. The theme of the training will be "Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage" and will focus on the importance of geographical names standardization, the relationship between toponymy and language, and geographical names as cultural heritage. The training aims to raise awareness and strengthen capacity within the UNGEGN community, on establishing a standardization programme, field collection of names, a variety of toponymic data processing and management methods, aspects of toponymic data exchange formats, and standards for producing a national gazetteer. The training and related theme are aligned to UNGEGN's

Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029, Strategies 1, 4, and 5: Technical expertise; Culture, heritage and language recognition; and Promotion and capacity building, respectively.

16. The training will be conducted in English, and will include six modules consisting of lectures, discussions, demonstrations, and practical exercises, and a one-day field exercise focusing on the collection of geographical names. Governments, cartographers, researchers, map and atlas editors whose work or studies are related to this subject are also encouraged to apply to attend the training.

17. Over the intersessional period alternate avenues for capacity building were pursued. This included the hosting of three webinars in collaboration with the UNGEGN Expanded Bureau and the Working Group on Training Courses in Toponymy and for the 2021 webinar, with the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, and the UN-GGIM Americas/Caribbean Geospatial Initiative. The webinars addressed topics relevant to advancing the UNGEGN work programme. The dates and topics of the webinars were as follows:

- 31 August 2021, Geographical names standardization supporting national development
- 10 May 2022, Developing Digital Gazetteers Using Free and Open-Source Software
- 30 September 2022, Linked Open Data Developments - What's in for UNGEGN and its Experts?

18. Overall, all webinars were well received, and each was attended by a global audience of over 100 persons. Webinar concept notes, presentations, videos and recordings are available on the UNGEGN webpage at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/working_groups/wg6.cshtml/. Based on the positive feedback received from webinar participants, the UNGEGN Expanded Bureau has indicated a willingness to continue staging them, with the focus on topics relevant to Member State requirements and in line with its programme of work.

V. Supporting UNGEGNs work across the UN Bodies and Agencies

Contribution to ECOSOC's Annual meeting of its subsidiary bodies and the High-Level Political Forum

19. ECOSOC operates at the centre of the United Nations system and works to advance all three pillars of sustainable development - economic, social and environmental. It is also responsible for the follow-up to a number of major United Nations conferences and summits. The cornerstones of the work of ECOSOC is the promotion of sustainable development, the implementation and evaluation of the 2030 Agenda and COVID-19 transformative recovery.

20. The United Nations system plays a critical role in supporting Member States' implementation of the SDGs. System-wide coherence at global, regional, sub-regional and country levels is crucial for the United Nations system to deliver on its mandates effectively. The annual meeting of ECOSOC with the chairs of its functional commissions and expert bodies, and the high-level political forum (HLPF) on SDGs follow-up and review, are two

mechanisms which are used by the United Nations to encourage other multilateral processes, agencies and entities to participate and present the alignment of their work with the SDGs, national to global COVID-19 recovery efforts and their contribution to the processes.

21. For the reporting period the UNGEGN Secretariat supported the Bureau to contribute to deliberations and participate in ECOSOC meetings such as the High-Level Political Forum, the Integration Dialogues, and the annual meeting of the Bureau of ECOSOC with the Chairpersons of the Functional Commissions and Expert Bodies. With the support of the UNGEGN Secretariat UNGEGN also participated in the review exercise of ECOSOC's functional commissions and expert bodies, which was led by the Vice President of ECOSOC from Bulgaria. The objectives of the review were to ensure that subsidiary bodies are fully aligned with the 2030 Agenda and produce high-quality assessments and policy recommendations on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, while promoting integrated and action-oriented approaches in doing so. The review was to ensure that the subsidiary bodies adequately support the work of the Council while also furthering ways for the Council to better integrate their outcomes into its own work.

22. In fulfilment of the mandate in the General Assembly resolution 72/305, through letter of 23 February 2022, the UNGEGN Bureau was requested to provide assessments and recommendations of its sessions. The assessments were guided by five questions which were based on General Assembly resolutions 75/290 A and 72/305. With support from the UNGEGN Secretariat a response was prepared and submitted to ECOSOC. The compiled [assessments prepared by the Bureaux of ECOSOC functional commissions and expert bodies](#) are available on the ECOSOC website. The output from the review process was a [Summary of Recommendations](#) by the Vice President. It is to be noted that on the matter of coordination and cooperation among subsidiary bodies, the longstanding collaboration between the Committee of Experts and the Group of Experts was highlighted on page 14 of the Summary of Recommendations document.

23. The summary document was adopted as per ECOSOC decision 2022/334 at its 2022 Management Segment. The decision invited the President and Bureau of the Council, the chairs and bureaux of the functional commissions and expert bodies of the Council, all Member States and the Secretariat to implement, to the extent possible within existing mandates and resources, the recommendations contained in the summary, and decided to review the implementation of the recommendations at its 2026 session.

Strengthening relations with the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management

24. For the past six years papers, reports, proposals have been presented on strengthening relations between the UN Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) and the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN). Collaboration among functional commissions and expert bodies of ECOSOC is also supported in the [summary recommendations by the Vice President of ECOSOC](#), noted by the Council's decision 2022/334 adopted at its Management Segment on 2 June 2022. The UNGEGN Secretariat has been supporting the strengthening relations initiative by assisting with the

preparation of working papers, facilitating meetings between both bodies and identifying opportunities and tendering proposals for collaborative activities.

25. For the reporting period the Secretariat supported the Bureau with the preparation of its report which was presented to the eleventh and twelfth sessions of the Committee of Experts. The UN-GGIM eleventh session was convened virtually, and UNGEGN's report [E/C.20/2021/15/Add.1](#) was delivered by its Chair Pierre Jaillard. The following are two pertinent decisions detailed in the UN-GGIM eleventh session report [E/2022/46 E/C.20/2021/16](#) at page 17/23. Decision 11/112 (b) supported efforts and actions for strengthening interaction and collaboration between the Bureaus of the Committee of Experts and the Group of Experts, including opportunities for partnership such as sharing technical expertise and geographical names data, pursuing joint capacity-building initiatives, raising awareness of the importance of toponymy, sharing guidelines, methods and practices for the standardization of geographical names and the preservation of native place names derived from indigenous languages, as part of the cultural heritage of a country; and (c) Encouraged Member States to improve communication, coordination and cooperation between geospatial information management authorities and geographical names authorities at the national and regional levels, including across thematic areas, to strengthen geospatial information management, noting that geographical names were an essential referencing component for geospatial data infrastructures and geospatial knowledge networks and a vital part of a country's linguistic and cultural heritage.

26. At the twelfth session of the Committee of Experts, Pier-Giorgio Zaccheddu, representative from Germany and member of the UNGEGN expanded bureau, introduced UNGEGN's report ([E/C.20/2022/18/Add.1](#)) under agenda item 16- Collaboration with the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names. An important element of the report was the project proposal on the development of a compendium of institutional arrangements and operational good practices aimed at strengthening relations between the Committee of Experts and the Group of Experts. The proposal was well received and included in the report of the session ([E/2023/46-E/C.20/2022/19](#)) decision 12/114 (d), which noted the efforts to build a stronger relationship between the Committee of Experts and the Group of Experts, supported the collaborative project proposal to increase cooperation, create synergies, and share knowledge and good practices for the standardization of geographical names. The decisions also included urging Member States and their national mapping and geospatial agencies to develop and adopt toponymic guidelines in collaboration with their national geographical name's authorities and encouraging the participation of representatives of national mapping and geospatial agencies to the 2023/third UNGEGN session. Details of this proposal is presented to the Group of Experts in a separate report (GEGN.2/2023/115/CRP.115) under agenda 5 (c) cooperation and liaison with other organizations: Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management.

Review of the role of liaison entities

27. The role and importance of international organizations in contributing and exchanging information on the standardization of geographical names was recognized by the Group of Experts at its first conference in 1967. Liaison officers are responsible for ensuring optimal collaboration and promoting communication between its assigned body and the Group of

Experts. The practice of submitting reports to each conference and session of the Group of Experts was mandated in Resolution V/8, adopted at the fifth Conference in Montreal Canada in 1987. It was *recommended that all officers responsible for maintaining liaison with international organizations prepare written reports on the activities of the organizations for submission to each United Nations conference on the standardization of geographical names and each meeting of the Group and that, in the absence of such liaison officers, the Secretariat request the organizations themselves to provide such reports.*

28. Over its long history liaison relations were created with several international organizations. The Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in 1998, recommended the establishment of a liaison with the International Organization for Standardization (Resolution VII/13). The Group went on to establish liaison with both the Unicode Consortium and the International Organization for Standardization, among others.

29. During the intersessional period the UNGEGN Secretariat updated the UNGEGN liaison officers webpage: - <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/liaison/> in an effort to have posted correct and current names and email addresses for the officers and also to provide a short explanation on the role of the liaison body. The exercise is not complete as additional information is needed for the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers and the International Council of Onomastic Sciences. Further consideration may be given to designating liaison status to the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research, Standing Committee on Antarctic Geographic Information. For the reporting period five international organizations submitted reports to the Group of Experts as per Resolution V/8. It is recognized that many liaison organizations are very active in their sphere of operations, however the Group may consider exploring the extent to which these bodies actively contribute to the work of UNGEGN in particular, to the tasks as outlined in the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029. Further, questions for consideration could be the degree of integration between UNGEGN and its liaison bodies, for example, is it possible that the work being done by ICA/IGU on cultural heritage be presented to the UNGEGN session for exploration and consideration of challenges and solutions of geographical names standardization to the mutual benefit of both bodies.

Preparations for Convening the 2023/third UNGEGN Session

30. The UNSD as the substantive Secretariat for the Group of Experts looks forward to welcoming Member State representatives, observers, members from civil society, international organizations, the private sector and academia to an open and totally in-person session. The organization of the session will be based on the formal procedures as laid out in the UNGEGN Rules of Procedure and session practices prior to the virtual session in 2021.

31. The UNGEGN Bureau and Secretariat began session preparations in the last quarter of 2022. Based on feedback received on the 2021 session of a short time frame between session notification and submission of summaries and reports, every effort was made to address this concern. The note verbale was electronically dispatched on 27th October 2022, seven months in advance of the session. The note verbale indicated that summaries were due on 20 January 2023, which was approximately three months' notice. Supporting session preparation

documents, the unedited versions of Documentation ([GEGN.2/2023/INF/1](#)) and the Provisional Agenda ([GEGN.2/2023/1](#)) we uploaded to the UNGEGN 2023 session webpage on the 28th October 2022. Documentation provided guidelines and dates for the submission of summaries, reports and technical papers. The deadline for submission of full reports was 13 March 2023. At this date 70 reports were received, and as of the 14 April a total of 125 reports were received, which means that 55 (or 44%) more reports were submitted after the deadline.

32. Document management remains a significant challenge for session preparation. This year, the Secretariat processed 242 documents, consisting of 3 procedural documents, 114 summaries and 125 reports. Forty nine of the 125 reports, or 39% were national reports. For this session an additional 25 papers were received and processed as compared to the 2021 session.

33. The Secretariat wishes to bring to the attention of the Group of Experts, Recommendation 2 of the 2019/1st UNGEGN session, approved by ECOSOC in decision 2019/231, which decided that *in close consultation with Member States, the Bureau of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names shall review the procedures and timing for the preparation of country reports and their submission to the sessions of the Group of Experts, as well as facilitate interactive processes for presentation of the material contained therein*. [E/2019/75, chap. I, sect. A, recommendation 2 and E/2019/SR.36] Pursuant to this decision, for this session, the UNGEGN expanded Bureau and Secretariat prepared an interactive approach, called National Dialogue, for the presentation of national reports under agenda item 4a. The objective of this approach is to provide Member States an opportunity to present and share their national/domestic experiences in an interesting and beneficial way.

34. The approach for the national dialogue is as follows:

- i. All the summaries and or reports submitted are reviewed, grouped into relevant themes and topics. A topic is assigned to each Member State. Should Member States have a very strong preference to present on a different topic, other than that which was assigned, a request to change the topic may be accommodated.
- ii. Each morning of the session, 45 minutes is allocated to consider national geographical names standardization topics, grouped into themes which were identified within national reports. (See Appendix 1 for national report themes)
- iii. Heads of national delegations is invited to present one topic from their report for 2-3 minutes. Each 2 to 3 minute oral presentation may be accompanied by one (1) PowerPoint slide. (The Slide template was provided)
- iv. On each day there will be a moderator to facilitate the theme's discussion.
- v. After the presentation of all reports for the theme, the floor will be opened for questions from the moderator and/or delegates.
- vi. It is estimated that ten (10) reports will be presented and discussed per day.
- vii. On the fifth day at the ninth meeting of the session, following the final presentation of national reports, the moderator will deliver an action-oriented summary of all five days presentations and deliberations, which will be included in the final session report.

This is the second approach to be used to present national reports since the inception of the reformulated UNGEGN in 2019. It is hoped that the approach will prove to be successful, interactive and contribute to knowledge transfer and enrichment among Member States. Member States will be asked to provide their feedback in the 2023 session evaluation survey, which provides the Bureau with data to make evidence-based decisions to plan for future sessions.

35. The attention of the Group of Experts is also being sought with regards to the format of National Reports, a matter which has been discussed by the UNGEGN Bureau several times. National report guidelines to some degree support standardization, which in turn allows for an examination of trends, measurement of progress, tells us how National Names Authorities are progressing in their standardization efforts, and most importantly provides an indication on what needs to be done to support countries in strengthening their standardization initiatives. One argument, against report models is the fact that not all National Names Authorities are at the same stage of operations, and they are all different in form, structure, function and operations. However, all entities- private, public, across all sectors prepares annual reports – there are auditor reports, accounting reports, production reports, project management reports, human resource management reports among many others. The possibility should exist to decide on a report structure and format that would be relevant to National Names Authorities.

36. The 2021 UNGEGN report, decision 2/2021/3 (c) that states: *Reaffirmed the commitment by the Bureau to produce a template for the country reports well in advance of the third session;* gives the UNGEGN Bureau a mandate for this task. An outcome of the Bureau’s discussion on the format of national reports is the guidance provided in Documentation ([GEGN.2/2023/INF/1](#)) in paragraphs seven and eight. Further to this action, the East Central and South-East Europe Division (ECSEED) brought the matter to the attention of the Secretariat and Bureau and tendered a [model for a national report](#). (Available on the UNGEGN Divisional webpage) The model report was presented at the Bureau and Divisional meeting on Thursday 30th March 2023 as an initial point of consultation among UNGEGN members. The Division shared that the motivation to prepare the model was resolution V/7 from the fifth Conference in Montreal, Canada in 1987. The resolution *recommend that the United Nations Secretariat, when sending invitations to Member States to participate in the conferences, attach a detailed plan (model) for the drafting of national reports, providing specific guidelines for countries to follow in reporting on the progress made in the standardization of geographical names since the preceding conference.* Further, the model was presented, discussed and approved at the ECSEED Division 24th meeting. The presentation to the UNGEGN Bureau and Divisions meeting shared that the model would be useful for new and existing Member States, its use would be on a voluntary basis, the model is in a table format for better clarity and the themes were extracted from the UNGEGN agenda. Representatives from Mexico, Brazil and the Republic of Korea welcomed the proposal and called for further comments from Divisional members. The Bureau thought that the presentation of the proposal was “*a good example of a Division who is actively bringing an idea to the Group of Experts seeking to generate divisional-led discussion and was a positive move toward the goal of activating the Divisions.*”

37. Additional activities planned for the week 1-5 May 2023 include, i) four special presentations- one from the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Google, Esri and

Herder Institute from Germany, ii) two panel discussions, one on “Strengthening relationships, links and connections in geographical names standardization and or sustainable development and pandemic recovery” and the second on “Connections between geographical names and the environment”, iii) [side events](#) featuring working group and divisional meetings, and iv) an orientation session for new attendees on Monday 1 May 2023 in conference room 4.

VI. Issues for Consideration

38. The UNGEGN Secretariat remains committed to advancing the standardization of geographical names and supporting the Group of Experts. In doing so, it will continue to work with the Bureau, Divisional Chairs and Working Group Convenors to implement the recommendations and decisions of past and current sessions. For the reporting period the focus was on strengthening the interlinkages across the subsidiary bodies of the Group of Experts and within the bodies and agencies within the UN system. However, continued emphasis is to be placed on strengthening relations and increasing awareness and importance of the work on standardization of geographical names, particularly in the areas of cultural heritage, recognizing the decade of Indigenous Languages, the importance of standardized names to disaster risk management and creating a culture of inclusivity using standardized geographical names. Another significant area of work was the Geographical Names Database. The future actions and next steps will be addressed in the supporting report (GEGN.2/2023/111/CRP.111).

39. The Secretariat once again calls upon the Group of Experts to consider the creation of an UNGEGN subsidiary body, which may be a high-level group or expert group with responsibility for encouraging and facilitating Member States with the creation and or strengthening national names authorities and addressing their challenges with names standardization. This body would provide the strategic leadership, coordination, planning, expertise and advice to assist countries in their geographical names standardization activities. Importantly the challenge of funding and resources to undertake UNGEGN’s work needs to be addressed. Member States are encouraged to consider supporting the creation of a trust fund to support the work of this proposed group and the implementation of the UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029.

VII. Points for discussion

40. The Group of Experts is invited to:
- (a) Express its views on the report and discuss the issues raised in support of strengthening the operations and work of the Group of Experts;
 - (b) Take note of the concerns raised regarding the Review of the Working Group exercise and provide guidance on how this exercise may be efficiently conducted;
 - (c) Take note of the model national report submitted by the East Central and South-East Europe Division and express its views on its implications to the preparation of national reports and
 - (d) Consider the need to have a specific body to support the strengthening and or creation of national names authorities and provide guidance on how best this could be achieved.

APPENDIX 1

UNGEEN 2023 Session

National Dialogue, Agenda item 4a.

Themes and Topics for presentation and discussion

1. National names standardization:

Names Boards/Commissions, etc.

- a. Legal frameworks, laws involved, Place Names Acts
- b. Policies, principles & procedures
- c. Programme planning (e.g. national/board strategic plans)
- d. New boards, or those in process of development
- e. International names standardization (inc. exonyms/country names)
- f. Challenges (e.g. where several gov. depts & local authorities have naming responsibilities.
How does this work & good practices

2. Cultural aspects of geographical names standardization

- a. Impact of cultural heritage on geographical names standardization
- b. Recognition and significance of minority and Indigenous geographical names and language in standardization programmes
- c. Treatment of names in multilingual areas
- d. Addressing and urban feature naming - who is responsible?

3. Technology, innovation and standards for geographical names data management

- a. Various ways that national databases are being improved or expanded
- b. Solving inconsistencies of geographical names on maps and in databases
- c. Links of geographical names standardization to mapping programmes
- d. Geographical names input into UN-GGIM
- e. Online gazetteers; printed gazetteers; websites; geoportals and other names documents
- f. Names collection and crowd sourcing

4. Cooperation, training and promotion

- a. Input of academia and specialists towards the process of geographical names standardization
- b. types of advice, decisions, etc.
- c. programmes re geographical names that have impact on standardization
- d. Toponymic training (in-house, national, etc.) offered to geographical names administrative staff
- e. Promotion of geographical names standardization and cooperation/outreach
- f. Support to international programmes / international collaboration
- g. Work against UNGEEN strategic plan

5. Other topics and conclusions

- a. National approach to romanization systems and to standardized written forms

- b. Pronunciation
- c. Antarctic and SCAR
- d. Challenges inc. changes in office approaches because of Covid-19 and other setbacks
- e. What works in different countries?
- f. Conclusions