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English

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

**2025 session**

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Item 5 (b) of the provisional agenda \*

**Technical expertise: Geographical names data management**

**Greenland report**

Submitted by Denmark (Greenland)\*\*

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This report is going to explain two main managements in the geographical names data, the first is standardization of place names in Greenland, and the second is about the current official Greenlandic orthography.

Standardization of place names in Greenland can be explained in several ways. The first one is that the sole authorization of Greenlandic place names takes place in Greenlandic by the Greenlandic Place Names Committee. This means that, in cases where a place has two names, one in Greenlandic and the other in another language, only the Greenlandic placename is authorized for official use. This way, the Greenlandic culture and the Greenlandic language are preserved and prioritized.

The Place Names Committee's approval criteria also show that the Greenlandic cultural way of naming places is prioritized in authorizations of place names. This is among other things expressed in fact that unnamed places are only named when the local population starts using these places.

For example a mountain in the area of the capital city of Nuuk has two names, where the Greenlandic and authorized name is *Ukkusissaq*. The other name for this same mountain is *Store Malene* in Danish, which means "Big Malene".

Its Greenlandic name means 'soapstone', because this mountain is or has been full of soapstones. Since the stone is very easy to carve and form, people from this area used to gather soapstones to make lamps or figures in the old days, before the kerosene lamps and the electricity came.

The Danish name *Store Malene* on the other hand refers to a name for a female person, and in this it does not follow the Greenlandic way of place naming. This simple example shows the necessity of standardization of place names in Greenland.

The second way that standardization takes place has to do with the structure of Greenlandic words and their spelling. Greenlandic words are built of a root that may be followed by some affixes (derivation) and in the end by inflection. There are three main dialects in Greenland: The Thule dialect in Polar Greenland, West Greenlandic in the west coast of Greenland and the East Greenlandic dialect. The current orthography is developed based on the so-called Central West Greenlandic dialect in West Greenland. The main dialects and the sub-dialects differ from each other in their sounds. The way Roman Script is used for Central West Greenlandic builds the current orthography. If place names can be written by spelling usage in the orthography, they can be used. However, if not, The Place Name Committee is obliged by law cooperating with The Greenland Language Council to come to the decision whether a place name should be authorized or not.

A simple example for the East Greenlandic place name is *Nasippik*, which in West Greenlandic is written as *Nasiffik*. Both word forms mean a 'lookout point'. *Nasippik* is authorized by the Committee, because the -pik in *Nasippik* sound matches the common principles.

Another simple example for the Thule dialect, are the -paluk endings of the placenames, like in *Qeqertapaluk*, meaning "small island", qeqertaq being "island" and -paluk being "small" or "little". This paluk-affix is not used in Central West Greenlandic, but can without any problem be written within the spelling usage in the current orthography.

There are very few place names with dialectal sound that does not match with the common principles for spelling usage, where The Place Name Committee cooperated with The Greenland Language Council to authorize place names. For instance, the name of a settlement in South Greenland does not match the common principles in the -mijit part in *Narsarmijit*. *Narsarmijit* means "those from Narsaq". The ending -mijit is written as -miut in West Greenlandic, so if the placename *Narsarmijit* had followed the common principles it should have said "Narsarmiut".

## **Points for discussion**

The Group of Experts is invited to:

- (a) Take note of the efforts made to spread the knowledge on geographical names and to foster geographical and cartographic research in toponymy.