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English

United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names

2025 session

New York, 28 April – 2 May 2025

Item 4 (b) of the provisional agenda *

**Reports: Governments on the situation in their countries
and on the progress made in the standardization of geographical names**

Report of Canada

Submitted by Canada**

Summary:

Since the 2023 session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), the Geographical Names Board of Canada (GNBC), as Canada's national coordinating body for geographical naming, has made progress toward achieving the goals set out in its 2020-2025 strategic plan. Recognizing that 2025 represents the end of the plan, efforts are now focused on planning for the future. The 127th annual general meeting of the GNBC was held in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, in the third quarter of 2024, and strategic planning was one of its aims.

The GNBC's domestic activities during the intersessional period focussed primarily on supporting and promoting Indigenous geographical names, addressing derogatory place names, and continuing to manage and improve Canada's national geographical names database.

The GNBC works to celebrate and raise awareness of Indigenous history and culture related to geographical names wherever possible. In 2023, Natural Resources Canada worked with the Gwich'in Tribal Council to develop *An Indigenous Place Names Handbook*¹ documenting practices to research and officially recognize hundreds of traditional Indigenous names for geographical features. The handbook aims to help other Indigenous communities repatriate their own geographical names and, if they so wish, have them submitted for official adoption by Canada's naming authorities.

The GNBC launched an exhibit showcasing a sample of geographical names rooted in Indigenous languages. The exhibit, *In the Languages of these Lands*, was

* GEGN.2/2025/1.

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¹ [An Indigenous Place Names Handbook: Sharing the Gwich'in Experience in Canada](#)

on display in Ottawa from July to November 2023. A digital exhibit² is still available online.

In addition, the GNBC worked with a linguist with expertise in Indigenous languages to consult with Elders, knowledge keepers and other experts, and prepare amendments and updates to the ISO 639-3 standard to better represent the diversity of Indigenous languages in Canada.

The GNBC is undertaking a variety of other activities to improve geographical names management in Canada. An interactive map showcasing changes to geographical names over time is in development. In addition, the GNBC continues to work to remove derogatory names from its databases. Certain offensive terms have been removed and/or changed through the actions of Canada's naming authorities, and the display of some previously official derogatory names has been masked.

Internationally, Canada actively participated in UNGEGN and related activities.

Canada's Co-chair attended regular meetings of the United States of America-Canada Division of UNGEGN. Canada also leads an UNGEGN Focus Group on Indigenous Geographical Names and looks forward to working with members on activities planned for 2025.

Canada actively participates in the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management and attended the sessions held in 2023 and 2024.

With the support of the Government of Canada, the International Cartographic Association is organizing the 32nd International Cartographic Conference in Vancouver, British Columbia from 16 to 22 August 2025, with the theme is "Mapping the Future: Innovation, Inclusion and Sustainability." Canada invites all interested Member States to consider attending.

² [In the Languages of These Lands](#)

Report of Canada

Background and Introduction

The Geographical Names Board of Canada (GNBC), established under a federal Order in Council, is the national coordinating body responsible for principles, procedures and guidelines for geographical naming in Canada. It comprises members from federal, provincial and territorial government departments and agencies, each with specific responsibilities for their respective jurisdictions and mandates, as well as an appointed Chairperson. The work of the Board is also guided by three Indigenous Advisors.

Working together as a multi-jurisdictional national body, GNBC members ensure that geographical names are consistently managed in Canada. The GNBC accomplishes its mandate by developing guidelines and standards for the treatment of geographical names and toponymic terminology; coordinating geographical naming activities in Canada; promoting the use of official names; and representing Canada in international forums. Its work is guided by standardized national guidelines: *Principles and Procedures for Geographical Naming*³.

The GNBC is supported by a Secretariat provided by Natural Resources Canada (NRCan), a department of the Government of Canada. NRCan also manages the Canadian Geographical Names Database (CGNDB) on behalf of the GNBC, providing a national repository for official geographical names from provincial, territorial and federal naming authorities.

Goals for geographical names in Canada

Since the previous session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), the GNBC has made progress toward achieving the goals set out in its 2020-2025 strategic plan, described in the Country Report from 2023,⁴ These goals were:

1. Review Role, Mandate and Governance
2. Enhance Internal Communication and Collaboration
3. Improve Database Content and Management
4. Enhance External Profile and Collaboration

Recognizing that 2025 represents the end of the plan, efforts are now focused on planning for the future. The 127th annual general meeting of the GNBC was held in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, in October 2024, and strategic planning was one of its aims. Several lessons learned are being incorporated into these discussions for the future, building from experiences under the previous strategic plan. Most importantly, the field of geographical naming is always evolving. It is important that the GNBC, in its strategic planning, remain flexible to adapt to changes as they come.

Furthermore, some of the work of the GNBC is undertaken through sub-groups with representatives from GNBC naming authorities. For example, the

³ [Guiding principles for geographical naming - Natural Resources Canada](#)

⁴ [Country Report for UNGEGN, Canada, 2023](#)

Respectful Geographical Naming Working Group is facilitating collaboration and action to address place names that are considered derogatory or offensive in Canada.⁵ It is also important that the work of these sub-groups is reflected in the strategic plan as well as in other guiding documents for the GNBC, and that this work continues to influence its direction.

One of the most notable goals of the 2020-2025 strategic plan was to review the GNBC *Principles and Procedures for Geographical Naming* ⁶. As the principles and procedures were adopted by the Board in 2011, it is important to ensure they still meet current needs. This review is underway, with a focus on making updates that reflect recent technology advancements, changes to the use of languages or translated names, and changes with regards to the management of Indigenous and derogatory geographical names.

Activities during the intersessional period

The GNBC's domestic activities during the intersessional period focussed primarily on supporting and promoting Indigenous geographical names, addressing derogatory place names, and continuing to manage and improve Canada's national geographical names database.

The GNBC works to celebrate and raise awareness of Indigenous languages, and cultures related to geographical names wherever possible. In 2023, NRCan supported the Gwich'in Tribal Council to publish *An Indigenous Place Names Handbook*⁷ documenting practices to research, record and compile Indigenous names for geographical features. The handbook aims to help other Indigenous communities repatriate their own geographical names and, if they so wish, have them submitted for official adoption by Canada's naming authorities. NRCan and the GNBC launched a public exhibit showcasing a sample of geographical names across Canada rooted in Indigenous languages. The exhibit, *In the Languages of these Lands*, was on display in Ottawa from July to November 2023. A digital exhibit⁸ is still available online. In addition, NRCan worked with a linguist with expertise in Indigenous languages to consult with Elders, knowledge keepers and other experts, and prepare amendments and updates to the ISO 639-3 standard to better represent the diversity of Indigenous languages in Canada. More information on the GNBC's work in support of Indigenous geographical names, languages and cultures in Canada is available through previous UNGEGN Bulletins (notably, editions 68⁹ and 66¹⁰), and is detailed in other reports submitted by Canada for the 2025 UNGEGN session.

The GNBC is undertaking a variety of other activities to improve geographical names management in Canada. A new interactive map is under development, and the GNBC continues to work to remove derogatory names from its databases. Certain offensive terms have been removed from NRCan's official maps, and/or changed through the actions of Canada's naming authorities, and the display of some previously official derogatory names has been masked on NRCan's public websites.

⁵ [Derogatory geographical names](#)

⁶ [Guiding principles for geographical naming](#)

⁷ [An Indigenous Place Names Handbook: Sharing the Gwich'in Experience in Canada](#)

⁸ [In the Languages of These Lands](#)

⁹ https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/pubs/Bulletin/UNGEgn_bulletin_no._68.pdf

¹⁰ https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/pubs/Bulletin/UNGEgn_bulletin_no._66_revised.pdf

Internationally, the Executive Secretary for the GNBC co-chaired regular meetings of the United States of America-Canada Division of UNGEGN during the intersessional period. Canada also actively participates in the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management and attended the sessions held in 2023 and 2024.

Action taken to support the implementation of the *UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029*

Several of the activities identified above would support elements of the *UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work*. For example, the exhibit *In the Languages of these Lands*, supports 2-i-4b, “cooperate in recognition of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL), 2022-2032.”

Canada also leads an UNGEGN Focus Group on Indigenous Geographical Names and looks forward to working with members on activities planned for 2025. Focus Group efforts notably support progress under **Strategy 4: Culture, heritage and language recognition**.

The Focus Group convened meetings on 3 May 2023, 26 November 2024, and 3 March 2025. Current activities are focused on preparing guiding documentation to support the operations of the group, including a terms of reference, and to make existing UNGEGN materials related to Indigenous or minority language geographical names more widely accessible.

The Focus Group is identified under action item 4-ii-5 regarding the treatment of geographical names in Indigenous, minority and regional language groups, as well as 4-i-4 relating to cooperation with providers of services useful to society. Its work to prepare updates to the UNGEGN webpage, providing access to a compilation of linked documents on Indigenous geographical names from UNGEGN Sessions, Conferences and Bulletins, notably supports 4-ii-5.

The Focus Group is also supporting progress under 2-i-4b, “cooperate in recognition of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL), 2022-2032.” In January 2025, the Focus Group engaged the Global Task Force for Making a Decade of Action for Indigenous Languages regarding a global survey developed by the Task Force to monitor progress under the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. The Focus Group submitted questions to be considered for inclusion in this survey, specifically relating to Activity 5.2, which targets the use of Indigenous languages on official signage.

The Focus Group will explore other opportunities related to its mandate and progress under the *UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work* as appropriate.

Conclusions and recommendations

Activities undertaken by Canada since 2023 have underscored the commitment to improve geographical names management, address derogatory geographical names, continue the GNBC’s strategic planning, and promote the significance of officially recognized Indigenous geographical names and the languages in which these geographical names are based.

Canada will continue to explore opportunities as they arise, domestically and internationally, to support promotion and standardization of geographical place names.

With the support of the Government of Canada, the International Cartographic Association is organizing the 32nd International Cartographic Conference in Vancouver, British Columbia from August 16-22, 2025. The theme is “Mapping the Future: Innovation, Inclusion and Sustainability.” Canada invites all interested Member States to consider attending.

Related Links:

- [32nd International Cartographic Conference | 32e Conférence cartographique internationale – MAPPING THE FUTURE: INNOVATION, INCLUSION, AND SUSTAINABILITY](#)

Points for discussion

The Group of Experts is invited to:

- (1) Take note of the present report.
- (2) Consider participation in the upcoming International Cartographic Conference in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada from August 16-22, 2025.