

## **ECOSOC Management Segment**

**25 July 2023**

### **Item 18: Economic and environmental questions**

#### **Introduction of the Report of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) on its 2023 session (E/2023/84)**

Madam Vice-President, Ambassadors, distinguished delegates;

Thank you for the invitation to address the Economic and Social Council. I am pleased to present the report of the Group of Experts on Geographical Names, which contains the decisions on the work and progress made over the past two years and plans for the current intersessional period.

Geographical names are undoubtedly necessary for identification of locations, and then to underpin data collection, managing, monitoring and analysis in support

of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Regrettably, their importance is not readily recognized and geographical names are often taken for granted. Therefore, it is important for us to increase awareness of, and knowledge on the standardization of geographical names.

Allow me to remind that the Group of Experts works through 24 linguistic and geographical divisions, 10 working groups and task teams and 8 liaison international and regional technical bodies, led by its Bureau. Its last biennial session was attended by 219 delegates from 62 Member States, including observers, civil society, international organizations, the private sector, and academia. Sixty technical papers were introduced and discussed. Through consensus, the date (28 April to 2 May 2025) and provisional agenda for the 2025 session, the procedural report, three recommendations and 22 decisions were adopted.

The session addressed the theme "Strengthening relationships, links and connections in geographical names standardization and for sustainable development and pandemic recovery". This theme is not only aligned to the theme of the 2023 ECOSOC High-level Political Forum on sustainable development, but also to UNGEGN's Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029, Strategy 2: Relationships, links and connections. Good relationships, links and connections are fundamental to all the other UNGEGN's strategies and are at the heart of the work of the United Nations.

In pursuance of Recommendation 2 of the 2019 UNGEGN session, approved by ECOSOC in decision 2019/231, which requested the UNGEGN Bureau to facilitate an interactive process for the presentation of country reports, a new national dialogue was conducted. The objective of this approach was to provide Member States an opportunity to present and share their national experiences in an

interesting and beneficial way. This new approach proved to be successful, interactive, and contributed to knowledge transfer and enrichment among Member States. Common strands and work methods became apparent, and the session drew conclusions on areas of shared endeavour and ways of working, and possible future work, notably in the areas of crowd sourcing of geographical names data and data validation methodologies.

Pursuant to the recommendations by the Vice President of ECOSOC, on collaboration among functional commissions and expert bodies, noted by the Council's decision 2022/334, UNGEGN continues to strengthen its relations with the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM). UNGEGN designed and proposed a collaborative project to develop a compendium of institutional arrangements and operational good practices between national mapping and geospatial agencies, and national names authorities. The

project proposed to the Committee of Experts was well received at its twelfth session in 2022 as per decision 12/114. Eight Member States (Argentina, Canada, Germany, Jamaica, Morocco, New Zealand, Sweden and the United Kingdom) indicated their support for the project. Further, plans are being made to implement the project (decision 3/2023/9).

The Group of Experts is also pursuing another collaboration with UN Maps. This is a geospatial initiative that aims to assist UN Peacekeeping missions by providing its peacekeepers with topographic maps, to support peace and security, navigation and logistics, to help the missions in their tactical and operational activities, as well as help countries torn by conflict to create the necessary conditions for lasting peace. Two UNGEGN experts participated in the 2nd UN Maps Conference in March 2023 in Spain, with the objective of strengthening the coordination, collaboration and sharing mechanisms on geospatial

information within the United Nations system and beyond to address climate change, sustaining food systems, ensuring universal access to care and education, and ensuring peace and justice for countries. UNGEGN has identified three areas in which it could assist the UN system; they are: i) training in the collection and recording of geographical names, (ii) the collection of geographical names with emphasis on preparing a standardized set of mutually upgradable (and reversible) standards for recording geographical names and (iii) making national geographical names data available. The Group of Experts (in decision 3/2023/8 - Cooperation and liaison with other international organizations) supported further cooperation with the United Nations Geospatial Network and United Nations Maps, and reaffirmed the importance of relationships between the Group of Experts and other organizations with which it maintains liaison such as the International Cartographic Association, the Council of

## Onomastic Sciences and the International Hydrographic Organization.

In conclusion, UNGEGN remains committed to advancing the standardization of geographical names. For the reporting period, the focus was on strengthening the interlinkages across the subsidiary bodies of the Group of Experts and the bodies and agencies within the UN system. Consideration is being given to having continued emphasis on strengthening relations and increasing awareness on and importance of the work on standardization of geographical names, notably in the areas of cultural heritage, recognizing the decade of Indigenous Languages, and the importance of standardized names to disaster risk management.