

## **ECOSOC Management Segment**

**30 July 2025**

### **Item 19: Economic and environmental questions**

#### **(i) Geospatial information: Introduction of the Report of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) on its 2025 session (E/2025/70)**

Mister Vice-President, Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you on behalf of the Group of Experts on Geographical Names, and to present the report of our 2025 session, which brought together 244 experts from 64 countries to discuss 166 reports.

Our theme was aligned with the one you had adopted for this year: “Advancing geographical names standardization through inclusive, culturally-informed and evidence-based solutions to support sustainable development”. This was also aligned with the Rules of Procedure that you gave to

us in 2018, one of whose principles is to “be based on the achievements of science in relation to both language treatment and the technical means of processing and generating toponymic data” (II, 4, a).

On the matter of “technical means”, the last session highlights our focus on the latest progress. This is a field of close collaboration with the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management and with the Statistical Commission. As a common outcome, the Group of Experts has “adopted the concept for a universal unique identifier for cities” (decision 2025/4/8 (g)), which is to be presented for endorsement next week at the fifteenth session of GGIM, and then hopefully to the Statistical Commission. This identifier is to be implemented in the redeveloped World Geographical Names Database of the Statistics Division.

Excellencies, looking forward, are we truly taking advantage of all the insights that modern linguistics offers? In this domain, as in many others, grounding our choices

in science is what ensures they are both universal and enduring. Linguistics teaches us — through both empirical study and lived experience — that language evolves through usage, not through external norms. The standardization of geographical names can only succeed if it is genuinely adopted by those for whom it is intended, and then if the recommendations themselves reflect established usage across the general population and diverse communities, including indigenous or minority groups. To ignore this is to risk building policies on foundations that will not hold.

Geographical names are a masterpiece of how we locate ourselves in our world. They reflect how we understand and engage with everything around us, and they are therefore imbued with historical and cultural significance. But they also enable everyone to relate to geographical location. In this regard, the standardization of geographical names is relevant to all SDGs, enabling the advancement

of sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda and their national priorities. From updates on national naming policies to in-depth examinations of language recognition, cultural heritage, and the role of standardization in sustainable development, our 2025 session showcased the richness and relevance of geographical names work. It also highlighted innovative tools, celebrated collaboration across countries and disciplines, and reaffirmed a shared global commitment to inclusive, culturally respectful, and evidence-based naming practices as part of a sustainable and equitable future.

A persistent and complex issue remains the use of *exonyms*, namely place names in languages not spoken in the locations they refer to, such as '*Germany*' in English or '*Allemagne*' in French. Encouragingly, the last session reflected a growing awareness of the importance of this topic, as demonstrated by the number of thoughtful interventions it inspired. In looking to our work in the

coming intersessional period, we must continue our dialogue and discussions on this domain, like all our areas of work, with openness and scientific grounding, working collaboratively toward a shared understanding that respects both linguistic diversity and local realities.

Excellencies, guided by the decisions adopted in our closing session, we have now “gotten back to work” and, with your assent, we look forward to meet again for an in-person session in May 2027. Our future work plan includes building on our collaboration with GGIM, the Statistical Commission, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and now also UNESCO.

Thank you for your attention.