

**UNGEGN Brief for
Meeting of ECOSOC with Chairs of Functional Commissions and Expert Bodies
Friday 31st January 2020**

A. Relevance and Benefits of Geographical Names

Geographical names constitute the basic reference framework for indicating location and orientation but doubts or ambiguity about the written form or application of a name can lead to confusion. In order to improve communication between peoples, countries and cultures, standardization of geographical names is required. Geographical names standardization is therefore a key element of the communication needed to enable the United Nations to become the world's most effective voice for international cooperation on behalf of peace, development, migration, refugee resettlement, human rights and the environment. Governments and all sectors of society's operations depend on authoritative naming of locations, including regional and local authorities, legal institutions, statistical bureaus, tourism authorities, public works departments, transportation companies – air, land and sea, national security agencies, disaster management authorities, users of the internet, businesses and the public in general.

B. UNGEGN's Mandate

The mandate of UNGEGN focuses on the ability of every country to be responsible for standardizing its geographical names. The mandate on national standardization is enshrined in resolution I/4, one of the most significant and long enduring, decided on at the first United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names held in 1967. The core responsibility of UNGEGN is to encourage countries to be responsible for the standardization of geographical names in their jurisdictions.

C. Responding to Resolution 72/305

UNGEGN's improved working method

Over its 50-year history the Group of Experts operating modalities have changed, the most recent in 2017 when both the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN) and the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names were discontinued and subsumed by a new subsidiary of ECOSOC named the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names. The new body retains the mandates of the previous two were relevant, as well as the resolutions of the Conference. (E/RES/3028/2) and now convenes biennial sessions over a period of five days (previously UNCSGN were two weeks). Some benefits gained from the new body include: - cost savings, with an overall reduction in meeting days; more timely strategic direction-setting and better clarity on the purpose of meetings. The first session was held 29 April to 3 May 2019. Further to these changes the Expert Group has a new Rules of Procedure and an agenda both approved by ECOSOC in July 2018 (E/2018/264).

UNGEGN's work programme being aligned with the 2030 agenda and responds to resolution 72/305

At its first session the Group of Experts made three recommendations aimed at aligning its work to that of the wider UN and ECOSOC and also follow up actions in response to GA resolution 72/305. These are reflected the Recommendations 1, 2 and 3 of [UNGEGN's first session report](#)¹.

Recommendation 1 – calls for the development of a draft strategic plan and programme of work for the new Group of Experts. The UNGEGN Bureau is currently guiding the preparation of the strategic plan and programme and ensuring its alignment to the 2030 agenda, also taking into consideration the Decade of Action.

Recommendation 2- the Bureau of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names is required to 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.

Recommendation 3 – requested that the Working Groups on Evaluation and Implementation, Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage and Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers review the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council resolutions noted in document GEGN.2/2019/83 for their relevance to the work of the Group of Experts and submit the information report to the Group of Experts at its second session for consideration.

The group continues to refine its operation modalities and will be convening a working meeting in July 2020 facilitated by the Republic of Korea to address recommendations from its first session and prepare for the 2nd session which is scheduled on 3-7 May 2021.

D. Supporting sustainable development added to its work program and at agenda at item 8

UNGEN is a new body and is currently organizing its work to address its core mandate and that of supporting the broader UN system. In recognition of the overarching 2030 Agenda, it has added supporting sustainable development to its agenda² at item 8; which was addressed for the first time in April 2019. The group recognizes the work being done by ECOSOC and would be in a best able to contribute to HLPF process in subsequent years.

E. Division of labour and cooperation among subsidiary bodies

In pursuance of cooperation among subsidiary bodies, UNGEGN has been undertaking several initiatives.

Collaboration with the Economic Commission of Africa on the standardization of geographical names

Recommendation 4 of the first session requested the Bureau through the Task Team for Africa, shall continue to urge the Economic Commission for Africa to collaborate with the Group of Experts, for example on the development of the GeoNyms application and implementation of the Gaborone Action

¹ Report of the UNGEGN on its 2019 session, 29 April-3 May 2019 (E/2019/75)

² Annotated Provisional Agenda (GEGN.2/2019/1/Rev.1)

Plan on Geographical Names Activities in Africa, as steps to achieve geographical names standardization in the countries of Africa.

Strengthening relations with the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information

Management through the following:

- Three face to face joint meetings in 2017,2018 and 2019 were held between the UNGEGN and UN-GGIM bureaux with the objective of strengthened relations and joined coordination.
- each body has an agenda item on the other agenda which requires the preparation of reports and presentations to be made at each body's plenary meeting
- UNGEGN's experts have been supporting the work of the UN-GGIM committee's work on preparation of the minimum list of global fundamental geospatial data themes. This working group has completed its work. Geospatial data is key to supporting SDG monitoring and thus the relevance of the fundamental geospatial data themes.

Interaction with Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

During the 1st UNGEGN session, a vice chair of the PFII delivered a special presentation on "Indigenous Issues and Cultural Heritage". The presentation was well received, and future interaction is to identified and actioned.

Promotion of Civil Society during formal sessions

The new rules of procedure adopted in 2018, Rule 48 Participation of observers, provides for the participation of NGO's. UNGEGN also has an history of having liaison officers from supporting and relating international organizations participating and reporting on their activities in it is sessions e.g. International Cartographic Association.

The UNGEGN Bureau remains committed to advancing the standardization of geographical names and will continue to build on the advancements made in modernizing and making its operations efficient, and to strengthen its alignment with other expert bodies of ECOSOC.