

**ECOSOC, Coordination and Management Meeting**  
**Item 18 (i): Economic and environmental questions, Geospatial Management**  
**22 July 2021**

**Introduction by Pierre Jaillard, France**  
**Chair of UNGEGN**

Vice President ECOSOC,  
Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates,

Thank you first for giving me the opportunity to report to you on our biennial plenary session, held informally and virtually in May this year. First, I must recognize the assistance provided by ECOSOC and the UN Secretariat to our body through the current pandemic, which enabled us to convene our 2021 session at the scheduled date. The session addressed the theme “Geographical Names Supporting Sustainable Development and Management of the Pandemic” which supports General Assembly resolution 70/1. Even in a virtual format and despite some inevitable stress, the commitment and collaboration from everyone made it possible to have a successful session and notable achievements.

A principal outcome from the UNGEGN session is Recommendation one, which seeks ECOSOC’s adoption of our Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021 to 2029. This document, which is aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals in its duration and substance, is to be used to build on the advancements made in streamlining and making the Group of Experts operations efficient, to strengthen the Group’s alignment with other expert bodies of ECOSOC and support ECOSOC’s work.

The Strategic Plan and Programme of Work stresses that “the monitoring of SDGs should be adequately supported by thematic analyses based on a set of geospatial data, of which geographical names are a core element”, and it offers UNGEGN’s expertise notably for capacity building across Member States.

I am pleased to announce that UNGEGN will bolster its contribution to target 11.4 “Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural [and natural] heritage”, through cultural, heritage and language recognition among geographical names. As early as 1972, but especially since 2002, UNGEGN has recognized the heritage value of place names, and has promoted the recording of locally used names reflecting the languages and traditions of a country.

Furthermore, the last session has opened three new work items, focusing on the environment, on inclusion and on exonyms.

With regards to the environment, our Group of Experts has recommended to ECOSOC to urge the Group to “consider current and potential connections between geographical names and the environment and incorporate examples of relevant practices, research or working relationships in its operations and deliberations”. Allow me to give you a very simple example of how landscape is shaped by place names: the very name of Greenland shows that it has not always been fully snow-white.

Regarding the work item on inclusion, place names can be indicators of where actions should be taken. UNGEGN “considers the development of guidelines aimed at equality and inclusion in geographical names, in harmony with the principles on restoring, protecting and preserving cultural heritage, noting the contribution to relevant Sustainable Development Goals”. Our challenge is to reconcile this concern with the “principle” of limitation of unnecessary changing and the “value” of political neutrality. That will be our challenge for next years.

Another item is exonyms, that is place names in languages that are not spoken in those places. The policy towards exonyms looks for an equilibrium between technical needs and the safeguarding of the cultural diversity, focused notably in Sustainable Development Goals. We have decided to “conduct further discussions on finding guidelines that reconcile the current resolutions of the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names on exonyms and its acknowledgement of exonyms as part of the cultural heritage.”

The report of this last session includes also technical decisions on our regular work programme in areas such as: social and economic benefits, supporting sustainable development; geographical names as culture, heritage and identity, including indigenous, minority and regional languages and multilingual issues; romanization; national and international standardization of geographical names; toponymic data files and gazetteers; education; measures taken and proposed for the implementation of resolutions and evaluation of the work of the Group of Experts; cooperation and liaison with other organizations.

Keeping or strengthening the consistency of our own outputs, among themselves and with the goals of the international community needs work, decisions and time, with reality as the constant referee. The strategic planning exercise is an ongoing process and therefore UNGEGN’s Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029 is a living document, subject to continued reassessment and revision. The UNGEGN Bureau noted that its work will be subjected to unanticipated opportunities and threats which will impact the strategies and programme of work, thus necessitating corresponding response and revision of the document.

Distinguished Delegates,

On behalf of the Bureau of UNGEGN, I confirm our commitment to continue working towards achieving the objective of every country having a fully functioning and globally-aligned structure and policy framework, based on common principles for national standardization of authorized geographical names that identify location and respect the associated culture and heritage, and welcomes ECOSOC’s continued support of its work.

I wish you productive deliberations and a successful 2021 Management Segment.

Thank you.