

CONTRIBUTION TO THE 2019 HLPF

UNGEGN

18 March 2019

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.

The mandate of UNGEGN focuses on the ability of every country to be responsible for standardizing its geographical names. The standardization processes have been discussed since the first meeting of a group of experts in 1960, which was called in response to ECOSOC resolution 715A (XXVII). 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.

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 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 where relevant, as well as the resolutions of the Conference. (E/RES/3028/2) and will now convene biennial sessions over a period of five days beginning in April 2019. Further to these changes the Expert Group has a new Rules of Procedure and a draft agenda both approved by ECOSOC in July 2018 (E/2018/264).

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 agenda at item 8; which will be addressed for the first time in April. The group recognizes the work being done by ECOSOC and would be in a best able to contribute to HLPF process in subsequent years.

Preliminary work has started with UNGEN collaborating with the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management Working Group on Global Fundamental Data Themes to support the preparation of the minimum list of global fundamental geospatial data themes. Geospatial data is key to supporting SDG monitoring and thus the relevance of the fundamental geospatial data themes.