

United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names



Experts during the 26th Session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (2-6 May 2011, United Nations Office, Vienna)

The **United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN)** is one of the seven expert groups of the **United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)** and deals with the national and international **standardization** of geographical names.

1 History

The question about the standardized way of writing geographical names was raised by the United Nations Cartographic Section of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in the late 1940s. It was discussed in the 1950s and in response to ECOSOC resolution 715A (XXVII) of 1959, the first meeting of a group of experts was convened in **New York City** in 1960. This group recommended that a UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names be held. In 1967 this took place in **Geneva**, with the confirmation that national standardization should be the basis of international standardization.

2 Mandate and tasks

The remit of UNGEGN is to deal with the problems of domestic and international standardization of geographical names, and to offer suggestions and recommendations for (mainly linguistic) standardization. Being one of the seven expert groups of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, UNGEGN is mandated to follow up on

the implementation of resolutions and to continue activities between the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names held every five years. UNGEGN aims to emphasize the importance of the standardization of geographical names at the national and international levels, to show the benefits of this, and to assist countries in standardization of geographical names where it is lacking. Furthermore UNGEGN facilitates and encourages the discussion of the results of work on national standardization and arising issues, the dissemination of best practices, and a wide user community awareness of nationally authorized geographical names.

3 Structure

UNGEGN reports to the UN Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names held at five-yearly intervals. It is supported by a Secretariat provided by the United Nations statistics Division, and its Bureau. UNGEGN meets formally on two occasions between Conferences and in addition works on names standardization through Working Groups and Special task teams, as well as through Divisions. These so-called Divisions are groups of countries with common interests based on geography and/or language. To interact with other scientific organizations, UNGEGN has appointed a number of liaison officers.

3.1 Bureau

The UNGEGN Bureau consists of a Chair, two Vice-Chairs and two Rapporteurs. The current Bureau is composed as follows:

- Chair: William Watt (Australia)
- Vice-Chairs: Ferjan Ormeling (Netherlands), Naima Friha (Tunisia)
- Rapporteurs: Peder Gammeltoft (Denmark), Trent C. Palmer (USA)

Former chairpersons:

- Meredith F. Burrill (USA, 1967-1977)
- **Josef Breu** (Austria, 1977-1982)

- Dirk Peter Blok (Netherlands, 1982-1987)
- Henri Dorion (Canada, 1987-1991)
- Peter E. Raper (South Africa, 1991-2002)
- Helen Kerfoot (Canada, 2002-2012)

3.2 Divisions

UNGEKN is composed of experts from various linguistic/geographical divisions that have been established by the UN Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names. Countries decide for themselves the division(s) to which they wish to belong; some belong to more than one division. A division chair is selected within a division and he/she is encouraged to stimulate activities in the standardization of geographical names within the division, through technical meetings, correspondence, etc.

Currently, there are 24 divisions that guide the work of UNGEKN during and between its sessions:

- Africa Central Division
- Africa East Division
- Africa South Division
- Africa West Division
- Arabic Division
- Asia East Division (other than China)
- Asia South-East and Pacific South-West Division
- Asia South-West Division (other than Arabic)
- Baltic Division
- Celtic Division
- China Division
- Dutch- and German-speaking Division
- East Central and South-East Europe Division
- Eastern Europe, Northern and Central Asia Division
- East Mediterranean Division (other than Arabic)
- French-speaking Division
- India Division
- Latin America Division
- Norden Division
- Portuguese-speaking Division
- Romano-Hellenic Division
- United Kingdom Division
- USA/Canada Division

3.3 Working Groups

Under the umbrella of UNGEKN, several Working Groups have been created to follow up topics and issues which cut across the Divisional structure of UNGEKN. In addition, UNGEKN has a Task Team for Africa and coordinates the work of countries in developing their *Toponymic Guidelines*.

Currently there are 10 UNGEKN Working Groups:

- Working Group on Country Names
- Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers
- Working Group on Toponymic Terminology
- Working Group on Publicity and Funding
- Working Group on *Romanization Systems*
- Working Group on Training Courses in Toponymy
- Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation
- Working Group on Exonyms
- Working Group on Pronunciation
- Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage

4 See also

- *Toponymy*
- *Toponymy in Great Britain*
- *UNGEKN Toponymic Guidelines*

5 References

- Hausner, Isolda: Die „United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names“ (UNGEKN) und die Standardisierung geographischer Namen. In: Kainz, W. / Kriz, K. / Riedl, A. (eds.): *Aspekte der Kartographie im Wandel. Festschrift für Ingrid Kretschmer zum 65. Geburtstag*. Wien 2004 (= Wiener Schriften zur Geographie und Kartographie).
- Kerfoot, Helen: Role of the United Nations in the standardization of geographical names: some fifty years on. In: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division (ed.): *Manual for the standardization of geographical names*. United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names. New York 2006: 83-97. ISBN 92-1-161490-2

6 External links

- [UNGEGN Official site](#)
- United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (2007). “[Technical reference manual for the standardization of geographical names](#)” (pdf). New York: United Nations. pp. 44–45. ISBN 978-92-1-161500-5. Retrieved 6 April 2011.

7 Text and image sources, contributors, and licenses

7.1 Text

- **United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names** *Source:* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Group_of_Experts_on_Geographical_Names?oldid=673825161 *Contributors:* Renata, Rich Farmbrough, Aotearoa, TXiKiBoT, Rudolph Buch, Dthomsen8, Addbot, Luckas-bot, Night w, RjwilmsiBot, In ictu oculi, EmausBot, Любослов Езыкин, Madreselva, Santner, Helpful Pixie Bot, Maah-maah, ChrisGualtieri, Jodosma, KasparBot, Ungegn and Anonymous: 4

7.2 Images

- **File:26th_Session_of_UNGEGN_3.JPG** *Source:* https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d4/26th_Session_of_UNGEGN_3.JPG *License:* CC BY-SA 4.0 *Contributors:* Own work *Original artist:* Ungegn
- **File:Commons-logo.svg** *Source:* <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/4/4a/Commons-logo.svg> *License:* CC-BY-SA-3.0 *Contributors:* ? *Original artist:* ?

7.3 Content license

- Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0