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**United Nations Group of Experts on  
Geographical Names  
2019 session**

New York, 29 April – 3 May 2019

**Item 8 of the provisional agenda \***

**Social and economic benefits, supporting sustainable development, measures taken and proposed for the implementation of resolutions and evaluation of the work of the Group of Experts (Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation)**

**Alignment of the work of the United Nations Group of Experts on  
Geographical Names with the decisions and resolutions of the General  
Assembly and the Economic and  
Social Council**

Submitted by the UNGEGN Secretariat\*\*

Summary:

The full report has been prepared in order to raise awareness of resolutions and decisions adopted by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council in 2018 or earlier that may be relevant to the execution of the mandate of the Group of Experts on Geographical Names in the context of sustainable development. The report is aimed at facilitating deliberations in the Group of Experts on how the Group can contribute to the overall sustainable development efforts of the United Nations. The Group of Experts is invited to take note of the report

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\* GEGN.2/2019/1.

\*\* Prepared by the secretariat of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.

## I. Introduction

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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).
4. UNGEGN is currently focused on organizing its work to address its core mandate and that of supporting the broader United Nations system. In recognition of the overarching 2030 Agenda, the Group has added supporting sustainable development to its session agenda as item 8; which will be addressed for the first time in April 2019. Preliminary work has started with UNGEGN 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 the monitoring of sustainable development goals and thus the relevance of the [fundamental geospatial data themes](#), in particular the theme on geographical names.
5. The objective of this report is to raise awareness of resolutions and decisions adopted by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council in 2018 or earlier that may be relevant to the execution of the mandate of the Group of Experts on Geographical Names in the context of sustainable development. The report is aimed at facilitating deliberations in the

Group of Experts on how the Group can contribute to the overall sustainable development efforts of the United Nations. The Group of Experts is invited to take note of the report.

## **II. The General Assembly and ECOSOC**

6. The General Assembly serves as the chief deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the United Nations. It provides a unique forum for multilateral discussion of the full spectrum of international issues covered by the Charter. It also plays a significant role in the process of standard-setting and the codification of international law. The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), UNGEGN's parent body, is the central platform for fostering debate and innovative thinking, forging consensus on ways forward, and coordinating efforts to achieve internationally agreed goals. Importantly, ECOSOC operates at the centre of the United Nations system and works to advance all three pillars of sustainable development—economic, social and environmental. It is also responsible for the follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits. Both the General Assembly and ECOSOC are being revitalized to be more focused and relevant in a fast-changing world, to better serve Member States in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and to address the most pressing challenges facing the international community. A cornerstone of the work of these organs is the promotion of sustainable development and the implementation and evaluation of the 2030 Agenda.

## **III. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

7. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>1</sup> A/RES/70/1, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared roadmap for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and 169 targets which set out quantitative and qualitative objectives over 15 years. They are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.

8. The SDGs complement international conventions and other tools of international law by providing a globally shared normative framework that fosters collaboration across countries, mobilizes all stakeholders, and inspires action. The SDG's should be able to spur greater mobilization, promote innovation, and strengthen collaboration within networks of expertise and practice. Timely, accurate data on progress is crucial for effective accountability. The SDGs must drive improvements in data and monitoring systems, which look to capitalize on the "data revolution," i.e. significant improvements in local, national, and global data collection, processing, and dissemination, using both existing and new tools.

9. To achieve inclusive development, it is important for all stakeholders (national governments, civil society organizations, businesses, academic institutions, development partners, sub-national governments and local authorities) to engage in collaborative partnerships to implement the SDG's. This implementation is being done using a voluntary, participatory, transparent and integrated follow-up and review framework.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

10. The United Nations system plays a critical role in supporting member states' implementation of the sustainable development objectives. System-wide coherence at global, regional, sub-regional and country levels is crucial for the United Nations system to deliver on its mandates effectively. The high level political forum (HLPF) on SDG follow-up and review, is one mechanism which is used by the United Nations that seeks to encourage other multilateral processes, agencies and entities to participate and present the alignment of their work with the SDGs and their contribution to the process.

11. ECOSOC Functional Commissions and other intergovernmental bodies and forums are invited annually by the President of ECOSOC to provide substantive inputs to the HLPF, to showcase their contribution towards the 2030 Agenda in general, and particularly for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and respective targets that are most relevant to their respective mandates.

12. As a subsidiary body of ECOSOC, UNGEGN has been invited to contribute to the HLPF by showcasing the body's views and guidance on those aspects of its work related to SDGs and the 2019 theme "Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality" and particularly on the SDGs and respective targets (SDG 4, 8, 10, 13, 16 and 17) reviewed by the 2019 HLPF that are most relevant to its mandate.

13. In recognition of its role as a subsidiary body of ECOSOC it is deemed prudent to identify relevant resolutions critical to the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs and bring them to the attention of the Group of Experts.

14. The following table lists five resolutions of the General Assembly relevant to the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. Clauses deemed relevant for information and consideration have been extracted and highlighted in the section IV, actions requested by the Secretary General. Full text on the resolutions are available at <https://www.un.org/en/ga/73/resolutions.shtml>

<b>Symbol</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Title of Resolution relevant to sustainable development</b>
A/RES/67/290	2013	"Format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development"
A/RES/69/313	2015	"Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development"
A/RES/70/299	2016	Follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level"
A/RES/72/305	2018	"Review of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 68/1 on the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council"
A/RES/73/17	2018	"Impact of rapid technological change on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets"

#### **IV. Actions requested by the General Assembly**

##### **An improved and more effective institutional framework for sustainable development**

15. In its resolution A/RES/67/290 on the format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, the General Assembly decided that the meetings of the HLPF under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council shall follow up and review progress in the implementation of all the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and environmental fields, as well as their respective means of implementation, improve cooperation and coordination within the United Nations system on sustainable development programmes and policies, promote the sharing of best practices and experiences relating to the implementation of sustainable development and, on a voluntary basis, facilitate sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, and promote system-wide coherence and coordination of sustainable development policies.

16. In the same resolution the General Assembly also decided that the forum shall be supported by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat in close cooperation with all relevant entities of the United Nations system, including funds and programmes, multilateral financial and trade institutions, the secretariats of the three Rio conventions and other relevant treaty bodies and international organizations within their respective mandates;

##### **A global framework for financing development post-2015- Data, monitoring and follow-up**

17. In its resolution A/RES/69/313 on the “Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development”, the General Assembly recognized that high-quality disaggregated data is an essential input for smart and transparent decision-making, including in support of the post-2015 agenda and its means of implementation, and can improve policy-making at all levels. A focus on quantitative and qualitative data, including open data, and statistical systems and administrations at the national and subnational level will be especially important in order to strengthen domestic capacity, transparency and accountability in the global partnership. National statistical systems have a central role in generating, disseminating and administering data. They should be supplemented with data and analysis from civil society, academia and the private sector.

18. The General Assembly also recognized that greater transparency is essential and can be provided by publishing timely, comprehensive and forward-looking information on development activities in a common, open, electronic format, as appropriate. Access to reliable data and statistics helps Governments to make informed decisions, and enables all stakeholders to track progress and understand trade-offs, and creates mutual accountability.

19. In the same resolution the General Assembly also noted that data access alone, however, is not enough to fully realize the potential that data can offer to both achieving, monitoring and reviewing sustainable development goals. We should endeavour to ensure broad access to the tools necessary to turn data into useful, actionable information. We will support efforts to make data standards interoperable, allowing data from different sources to be more easily compared and used. We call upon relevant public and private actors to put forward proposals to achieve a significant increase in global data literacy, accessibility and use, in support of the post-2015 development agenda.

### **Follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level**

20. In its resolution A/RES/70/299 on the “Follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level”, the General Assembly encouraged coherence of the General Assembly and its Main Committees, the Economic and Social Council, the specialized agencies and the functional commissions of the Council, and other intergovernmental bodies and forums with the work of the high-level political forum towards the follow-up and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, urges that the quadrennial comprehensive policy review take into account the 2030 Agenda, and in this regard takes note of the ongoing work of the Assembly and its Main Committees, the Council and its functional and regional commissions and other intergovernmental bodies and forums on the review of their working methods and agendas in order to ensure that they address the implementation of the 2030 Agenda within their respective areas of expertise and mandates, while avoiding duplication;

### **Strengthening the Economic and Social Council**

21. In its resolution A/RES/72/305 on Review of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 68/1 on the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council, the General Assembly emphasized that the Economic and Social Council should aim at creating synergy and coherence as well as avoiding duplication and overlap in its work to ensure efficiency and effectiveness. It should also ensure an adequate division of labour among its subsidiary bodies and harmonization and coordination of their agendas and work programmes, while ensuring that the principles, critical aspects and implementation gaps of the 2030 Agenda are addressed.

22. The Economic and Social Council should improve its outcomes and the outcomes of its subsidiary bodies, making them more relevant, coherent and solution-oriented to address implementation challenges and ensuring their follow-up so as to strengthen the impact of the work of the Council.

23. In the same resolution the General Assembly stated that the subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Council shall similarly adopt their own respective themes, aligned with the main theme, while continuing to address issues or a theme necessary to discharge their other functions.

24. Further, in the same resolution the General Assembly decided that the Economic and Social Council should strengthen its oversight and coordination role of its subsidiary bodies. It

should review their work with a view to ensuring their continued relevance. It will also ensure that they produce technical and expert analysis, assessments and policy recommendations to inform the integrated view of the Council and inform efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda. It should effectively integrate the outcomes of its subsidiary bodies into its own work.

25. Also, in the same resolution the General Assembly decided that the Economic and Social Council should request its subsidiary bodies to ensure that they best support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the work of the Council. Their work should reflect the need for an integrated and action-oriented approach to the Sustainable Development Goals. Their recommendations should build on a solid evidence-based review of progress on the 2030 Agenda and of the outcomes of conferences and summits in their respective area. They should work in an efficient, effective, transparent and inclusive manner.

26. Also, in the same resolution the General Assembly decided that each subsidiary body shall consider whether there is a continued need for annual negotiated outcomes and ensure that, when they produce such outcomes, they are effective and action-oriented and result in increased levels of cooperation.

### **Impact of rapid technological change on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals**

27. In its resolution A/RES/73/17 on impact of rapid technological change on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and target, the General Assembly recognized the need for Governments, the private sector, international organizations, civil society, the technical and academic communities and all relevant stakeholders to be aware of the impact of the latest developments in rapid technological change on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, which continue to require international and multi-stakeholder cooperation in order to benefit from opportunities and address challenges in this regard, taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development, and respecting national policies and priorities.

28. In the same resolution the General Assembly also invited the Secretary-General to take into consideration the Technology Facilitation Mechanism and Commission on Science and Technology for Development findings and related reports in his report to the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council, and to bring to the attention of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination the importance for the diverse United Nations entities, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, to take into consideration this issue, within their respective mandates, bearing in mind the three dimensions and the integrated and indivisible nature of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets.

## **V. Other relevant Resolutions of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council**

29. Other resolutions that may be considered relevant to the work of the Group of Experts include those on disaster risk reduction and humanitarian assistance - A/RES/72/18, and

A/RES/72/13; geospatial information management - A/RES/72/77, E/RES/2018/14; international migration -A/RES/72/179; and agriculture and food security- A/RES/72/205 and A/RES/72/215, all of which in various forms and degrees call for the collection, sharing and making accessible, up-to-date, comprehensible data and information to support and strengthen evidence based policy creation and decision making.

30. The Group of Experts may also wish to consider resolutions relevant to indigenous peoples bearing in mind the work being done by its working group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage.

31. The Secretariat wishes to bring to the attention of the Group of Experts, the resolution “United Nations Declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples” A/RES/61/295 adopted by the General Assembly on September 13, 2007. The Declaration is the most comprehensive statement of the rights of indigenous peoples ever developed, giving prominence to collective rights to a degree unprecedented in international human rights law. The Group of Experts may consider Article 13 (1) of relevance, it states; Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons. In the same resolution the Group of Experts may also wish to consider Article 31, it states; Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.

32. Further resolution A/RES/73/156 on the “Rights of indigenous peoples” on the report of the Third Committee (A/73/586), the General Assembly expressed its deep concern at the vast number of endangered languages, in particular indigenous languages, and stressing that, despite the continuing efforts, there is an urgent need to preserve, promote and revitalize endangered languages, in particular indigenous languages; and also the importance of the International Year of Indigenous Languages 2019 to draw attention to the critical loss of indigenous languages and the urgent need to preserve, revitalize and promote indigenous languages, including as an educational medium, and to take further urgent steps to that end at the national and international levels.

33. In its resolution A/HRC/RES/39/13 on human rights and indigenous peoples, the Human Rights Council encourages States and all relevant academic institutions, indigenous peoples’ institutions and representatives, as well as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, as the lead agency for the International Year of Indigenous Languages, to participate actively in the organization and implementation of the activities relating to the Year in 2019 and to uphold the spirit of the Year by taking measures to draw attention to the critical loss of indigenous languages and the need to preserve, revitalize and promote them. In the same resolution the Human Rights Council encouraged States, according to their relevant national context and characteristics, to collect and disseminate data disaggregated by ethnicity, income, gender, age, race, migratory status, disability, geographic location or other factors, as appropriate, in order to monitor and improve the impact of development policies, strategies



and programmes aimed at improving the well-being of indigenous peoples and individuals, to combat and eliminate violence and multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination against them and to support work towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda.

34. Further the Group of Experts is being asked to note the “Action plan for organizing the 2019 International Year of Indigenous languages”, E/C.19/2018/8 that outlines actions and measures to be taken together by United Nations entities, Governments, indigenous peoples’ organizations, broader civil society, academia, the private sector and other interested actors in order to achieve the major objectives of the International Year.

35. In view of the information set out in the present report regarding resolutions and decisions adopted by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council in 2018 or earlier that may be relevant to the execution of its mandate, the Group of Experts may wish to frame its discussion around a) how can the collection, management, standardization and dissemination of geographical names support the implementation and monitoring of the SDG’s? b) what contribution can be made to activities in recognition of the International Year of Indigenous languages? c) does geographical names standardization impact and contribute to disaster risk reduction and humanitarian assistance, and agriculture and food security, and what mechanisms may be used to strengthen its impact and acknowledge this contribution?.