

## Tenth UN-GGIM Americas

### Why Standardize Geographical Names and The UN-GGIM, UNGEGN Collaborative Project

#### Lecture Notes

**DATE:** Tuesday 17 October 2023

**DURATION:** 90 minutes

#### DESCRIPTION

This side event examines what is a geographical name and explains why names standardization is important and beneficial to people and countries. The importance of national names authorities is briefly addressed. Furthermore, the module explains UNGEGN's structure and governance arrangements, its working procedures, its mission and, objectives. A short simulation exercise will be done in which the community seeks approval to create and change place names by making a presentation to their Geographical Names Authority. The side event will end with a discussion on the Collaborative UN-GGIM/UNGEGN project.

#### OBJECTIVES

1. The objectives of this session are to:
2. raise awareness on the importance and benefits of geographical names standardization;
3. strengthen UNGEGN's profile, by informing of its existence and on the work that it is been done by its members (Bureau, Divisions, Working Groups and Liaison officers)
4. encourage countries not having national geographical names authorities to consider creating such bodies and
5. Inform on and gain interest to participate in the collaborative UN-GGIM/UNGEGN project to identify good practices between NMAs and NGNAs.

#### CONTENT

1. What's in a name and names standardization
2. UNGEGN's structure and operations
3. Group Simulation exercise – Creating and changing a place name
4. The creation of national names authorities
5. The benefits of geographical names standardization
6. Discussion UN-GGIM/UNGEGN collaborative project.

#### LEARNING AND TEACHING APPROACHES

- 1 Lecture and discussion



**UNGEGN**

United Nations Group of Experts  
on Geographical Names



## 2 Simulation exercise

### READING AND OTHER RESOURCES

1. United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical names; *Manual for the national standardization of geographical names*; United Nations; 2006
2. United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical names; *Glossary of Terms for the Standardization of Geographical Names*; United Nations; 2002

### POLICIES AND LEGISLATION

1. Estonia Place Name Act, December 1996, <https://www.eki.ee/knn/ungegn/ung20kns.htm>, accessed on 14 June 2023
2. New Zealand Geographic Board Act 2008 [New Zealand Geographic Board \(Ngā Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa\) Act 2008 No 30 \(as at 28 October 2021\)](#), Public Act – New Zealand Legislation
3. South African Geographical Names Council Act 118 of 1998, <https://www.gov.za/documents/south-african-geographical-names-council-act>, accessed on 14 June 2023
4. Handbook on Geographical Names – South African Geographical Names Council, <http://www.dac.gov.za/sites/default/files/Handbook%20on%20Geographical%20names.pdf>, accessed on 14 June 2023
5. [Principles and Procedures for Geographical Naming 2011](#), Geographical Names Board of Canada, accessed on 14 June 2023

### USEFUL WEBSITES

Facilitator: Cecille Blake, [blake1@un.org](mailto:blake1@un.org)



**UNGEGN**

United Nations Group of Experts  
on Geographical Names



## WHAT ARE GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

### 1 TERMINOLOGY

The principle source is the [Glossary of terms for the standardization of geographical names](#), published by UNGEGN and downloadable from the UNGEGN website. The definitions of the terms are given in all six UN languages, so also in English and Spanish. Examined are the terms for geographical features, language, grammar, pronunciation, writing systems, toponyms, maps and toponymy. After all, for toponyms, we want to match specific topographical objects with specific names, from a specific language, written in a specific writing system on maps.

#### Geography:

We name objects or features on the Earth and extra-terrestrial ones, which we want to locate and classify:

- Coordinates* are the system of parallels and meridians with which we can indicate the location of points on the Earth
- Geographical features/objects* - Topographic feature on the surface of Earth.
- Topographical features/objects* - A portion of the surface of Earth or of any other planet or satellite that has recognizable identity.
- Natural features/objects* - Topographic feature not made or significantly modified by man
- Cultural features/objects* - Topographic feature made, or significantly modified, by man.
- Physical features/objects / invisible features* - Any topographic feature that can be observed visually.
- Maritime features/objects* - Hydrographic features associated with the sea
- Undersea features* - A portion of that part of Earth that lies beneath the surface of an ocean or a sea and that has recognizable identity
- Feature class* - Grouping of topographic features with similar characteristics, to facilitate classification, search and retrieval. Example: river, creek, brook, wadi etc., all classed under “stream”.

#### Language

When we name features, we use our language, so we need some linguistic definitions:

- language* - means of verbal communication used by a large community, including the words, their pronunciation and the methods of combining them.
- Official language* - language that has legal status in a country or part of it, and that serves as an admin. Language.
- Dialect* - Regionally or socially distinctive variety of a language, characterized and identified by a particular set of words, grammatical structures and pronunciation.
- Minority language* - language that is different from the official state language and that is spoken by a national minority. It may or may not have official status.
- Indigenous language* - Language native to a given region.
- Phoneme* - The smallest unit of sound in a language that changes meaning,

Language is made up of words, ordered according to a grammar but, of all the words, we are only interested in the toponyms, which are a specific form of nouns. Nouns (substantivo in Portuguese) are words designating a particular kind of being, place or thing, and proper nouns (substantivos propios)



are nouns identifying an individual person, place or thing. Antroponyms are nouns identifying individual persons, and toponyms are nouns identifying individual places or topographical features.

### Pronunciation

These toponyms are not only for reading but also for verbal communication, so we should be able to pronounce them correctly. So, we need to know what phonemes or sounds they are made up from: to convey that information we use audio tapes or the *international phonetic alphabet* – an internationally recognized set of symbols for phonetic transcription

### Writing systems

We need to write down the names in our gazetteers and maps, so we have to use writing systems and know about their characteristics:

- Alphabet* - Set of all letters of a language with alphabetic script, ordered in a specific sequence and provided with names for each letter.
- Characters* - Graphic symbol used as a unit in writing
- Vowels/consonants* - speech sounds in the articulation of which the breath channel is not blocked /speech sounds, produced by a constriction or closure at one or more points in the breath channel.
- Grapheme* - Graphic representation of a phoneme in a particular language.
- Diacritical signs* - A sign, usually small, placed above, below or across a letter in order to change the phonemic value of the original letter
- Capitals, lower case, hyphens, accents* need no definition
- Digraphs or ligatures* - A graphic stylized combination of two letters indicating that successive sounds are to be pronounced as one.

### Toponyms

As said, for toponyms we match specific topographical objects with specific names, from a specific language, written in a specific writing system. Toponyms may be *simplex or composite*, that is existing of different, separated parts

- Specific part* - The part of a toponym that does not constitute a generic term and that distinguishes it from others of the same feature class.
- Generic part* - The part of a toponym that consists of a generic term (Port-au-Prince; Sierra Nevada; Newport.)
- Allonym* = variant name - Each of two or more toponyms employed in reference to a single topographic feature.
- Homonym* - Each of two or more identical toponyms denoting different topographic features.
- Exonym* - Name used in a specific language for a geographical feature situated outside the area where that language has official status, and differing in its form from the name used in the official language or languages of the area where the geographical feature is situated.
- Endonym* - Name of a geographical feature in one of the languages occurring where the feature is situated
- Historical name* - Toponym found in historical document(s) and being no longer in current use.
- Local name* - Toponym applied by a geographically limited sector of a linguistic community to a feature in its area
- Official name* - Toponym sanctioned by a national names authority and applied within its jurisdiction.
- Short/long form of a name* - In toponymy, the abbreviated or short version of a name / Complete form of a toponym (in particular the name of a country), including all components
- Different categories of Toponyms bear different names: *oronyms, odonyms, choronyms, toponyms proper, hydronyms, anikonims or microtoponyms, hagonyms.*



## Maps

Maps are one of the forms in which toponyms are rendered. On maps we see that Generic terms can also be used individually as *descriptive terms* (in designations like cemetery, ferry, sports field or factory) and that *abbreviated individually used generic terms* occur as well (like FM for Farm, PH for Public House or Pub). Apart from those there are also *letters or characters with a symbol function* (like S for school, P for Post Office)

Apart from toponyms we discern the following concepts:

- Lettering* – the way in which the names are rendered on the map
- Fonts/typeface* – A font is a typeface of a specified type, style and size. A typeface is the style or design of a set of all print characters of an alphabet, regardless of size.
- Descriptive terms* or free generic terms- A word printed in a map, that designates a topographic feature by its properties, but that does not name it, so it does not constitute a toponym.
- Multilingual maps* - Map that, for a particular topographic feature, shows allonyms in different languages,
- Multiscriptural maps* - Map that presents toponyms in different types of script or writing systems.

## Toponymy

Within the field of toponymy we also have some names for specific products of our activities:

- Glossary* - Specialized list of terms relating to a particular field of study or interest, which may contain explanatory or descriptive information on the items listed.
- Gazetteer* - List of toponyms arranged in alphabetic or other sequential order, with an indication of their location and preferably including variant names, type of topographic feature and other defining or descriptive information.
- Place name index* - Ordered list of toponyms, including data about location but little or no additional information.
- Toponym Standardization* - The establishment, by an appropriate authority, of a specific set of standards or norms for the uniform rendering of toponyms.
- Official name* - Toponym sanctioned by a legally constituted names authority and applied within its jurisdiction.
- Toponymical guidelines* - Set of rules governing the standardization of a country's toponyms and their presentation in maps and gazetteers.
- Names authority* - A board or commission, assigned advisory function and/or power of decision in matters of toponymy by the state.



## 2 GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES HAVE MEANINGS

**Geographical names represent a vital part of the cultural heritage of a country**, because they express the relationships between a society and its environment. They function as a social consensus or as a sort of convention regarding this environment, reached through the ages. As toponyms function as spatial indicators, bearers of personal or social experiences, derived from the past, they also represent great cultural values. That is why it is essential to preserve them.

One could claim that toponyms represent the oldest still existing part of our cultural heritage, as they have been transmitted orally from generation to generation during hundreds or perhaps thousands of years. Apart from their original meaning, toponyms have acquired also connotations, additional meanings, for instance because their location was the place where a battle was fought, or where a peace was concluded, considered as humiliating. That is why toponyms also transmit emotional, ideological or social connotations.

### Santiago de Chile- Names have meaning

**Santiago** is also known as **Santiago de Chile**, is located in the country's central valley. In Chile, there are several entities that share the name "Santiago" and can often lead to confusion. The commune of **Santiago**, the **Santiago Province**, **Santiago Metropolitan Region** and **Greater Santiago (Gran Santiago)**.

The name "**Santiago**" was chosen by the Spanish conqueror Pedro de Valdivia, when he founded the city in 1541, as a tribute to James the Great, the patron saint of Spain. The name of this saint is rendered differently in Spanish, such as Diego, Jaime, Jacobo or Santiago, with the latter being derived from the Galician evolution of Vulgar Latin Sanctu Iacobi. There was no indigenous name for the area where Santiago is located, but the Mapuche language uses the adapted name "**Santiaw**."

When Valdivia founded the city, he named it "**Santiago del Nuevo Extremo**" or "**Nueva Extremadura**," ("Santiago of the New Frontier") in reference to the territory he intended to colonize and his home region of Extremadura. The name was eventually replaced, and to differentiate it from other cities called Santiago, the South American city is sometimes referred to as "**Santiago de Chile**" in Spanish and other languages.

FROM WIKIPEDIA,

The city lies in the center of the **Santiago Basin**, an enormous bowl-shaped valley consisting of a broad and fertile plain surrounded by mountains. Santiago Basin is part of the Intermediate Depression and is remarkably flat, interrupted only by a few hills.



**Place names would reflect the conditions that reigned when the place was first settled:** physical conditions (soil, vegetation, fauna, spectacular weather conditions, etc.). They can also reflect the object itself, such as a new town with a new statute, a new market or new fort, or they could indicate a man-made dam in a river, like many towns in the Netherlands: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, etc.

**Names can reflect specific events.** In Indonesia ago there was an accident of an aeroplane that crashed into a mountainside. The village that was partly destroyed by it was renamed Ilyushin by the inhabitants.

In their overseas expansion, the Dutchmen (people from the Netherlands) used Latin names. They called the region around the present New York city which they conquered in the 17th century ‘New Netherlands’, translated in Latin as ‘Belgica Nova’

In 1830, the inhabitants of the southern part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands revolted, and they seceded, calling their country Belgium.

In 1942, during the Japanese occupation, the name Batavia was changed to Jakatra, and, in 1945 the independent Indonesia changed it into Djakarta, and in 1972 in Jakarta.

Because the Dutch also colonized other parts of the world, the name Batavia is also present in the United States, Argentina, Guyana, Suriname.

**Geographical names bear images,** they are the links forged by the inhabitants of a region with its topographical features. They form part of the identity of the local population. Geographical names are the links forged by the inhabitants of a region with its topographical features. They form part of the identity of the local population. Indonesia – when we hear the name we think of a tropical paradise, beaches, rice fields, temples and temple dances – but it is also the place where night clubs were bombed by religious extremists. Place names can have a whole gamut of mental associations, in space or in time, like historical associations – with persons or events, developed by a person in the various stages of her life.

### 3 WHAT PRECIPITATED THE CREATION OF THE UN GROUP OF EXPERTS ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

“The writing of geographical names on maps and other documents has long been a source of difficulty and confusion and an obstacle to smooth progress and understanding in many economic, social and scientific activities, both national and international.”

1. Some examples of problems are:
  - a. Places having different names in different languages – for example, Jerusalem/El Quds;
  - b. Places having different spellings in different languages – for example, Geneva/Geneve/Genf/Ginebra/Ginevra;
  - c. Different methods of transliteration from one alphabet to another – for example from Arabic: Wadi el Jabal/Ouadi el Djebel/Ouadi el Gabal;
  - d. Different methods of transcribing ideographic languages (for example, Chinese) to alphabetic languages;



- e. Differing methods of rendering names from unwritten languages;
  - f. The exact extent of named geographical features;
  - g. Variations in the meanings of common geographic terms; for example, “creek” may refer to an inlet from the sea or to a small stream far from the sea
2. The lack of standardized names has caused difficulty in the work of map makers, statisticians, census takers and others, leading to undue and harmful delay and mistakes. Confusion is caused in the interpretation of legal and administrative documents dealing with such matters a boundaries or areas of jurisdiction.
  3. Nearly a century ago ( in 1873) the first meeting of the International Geographical Union noted the problem and passed a resolution that international usage should be based on national standardization. Other resolutions have followed at later meetings of this and other international organizations.
  4. The need for seeking solutions to the problems and moving towards some international standardization was considered by the UN as long ago as 1953; later Economic and Social Council resolution 715A(XXVII) and 929 (XXXV) marked two important steps in recognition which led the Un to convene the first international conference devoted exclusively to the subject at Geneva in 1967. *(Taken from E/CONF.53/3, UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, Geneva, 4-22 September 1967, Vol. 1 Report of the Conference)*

#### 4 WHY IS GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES STANDARDIZATION NECESSARY

In today’s digital world, standardized geographical names are vital. They help us find our way in society and they also help us organize the world we live in. They also play a key role in our efforts to achieve sustainable development, providing fundamental channels of communication, facilitating cooperation among local, national and international organizations. We also need standardized geographical names in emergency situations. Without them, it can be challenging to respond to crises.

Geographical names – a basic reference Geographical names constitute the most widely used reference framework for indicating location. The existence of more than one name for a given place raises uncertainty and can lead to confusion. In order to improve communication between peoples, countries and cultures, standardization of geographical names reflecting local usage is required.

Modern society depends on the use of standard geographical names for accurate and efficient administration and communication. A national standardization programme produces savings in time and money by increasing operational efficiency in all levels of government, industry, commerce and education. In particular, national standardization processes should eliminate duplication of work where more than one office or agency needs to use a body of consistent geographical names. A national names authority also gives a country the means to establish its own officially accepted names, instead of their having to be determined by non-governmental or international map, atlas and gazetteer makers.

See UNGEGN media kit no. 8 - [Microsoft Word - Media Kit 8 v1a Standardization HKupdate.doc \(un.org\)](#)





## Importance of geographical names Standardization to Cyprus

Geographical names of Cyprus are more than just labels on a map. They are a connecting point between man and the land. They are needed to identify, describe, and analyse geographical entities. They carry the hopes and challenges of culture and identity of all Cypriots. Misuse of geographical names can cause friction. The official geographical names of Cyprus depict the island's history and culture through the years. They constitute significant evidence for citizens, researchers, historians, archaeologists and others, for analyzing, understanding, and preserving the identity of the nation.

Benefits from standardization and use of geographical names can be categorized in four main groups, these being: • Technical, • Social, • Economic, and • Cultural

Geographical names are an important part of our geographical and cultural environment. They identify geographical entities of different kinds and represent irreplaceable cultural values of vital significance to people's sense of well-being and belonging. Ancient monuments, ancient settlements, churches, monasteries, mosques, cemeteries and other significant topographical features, along with their respective geographical names, are solid examples and inseparable part of the cultural history of Cyprus.

## 5 THE EVOLUTION OF UNGEGN

### Brief History of UNGEGN

ECOSOC resolution 715A (XXVII) of 1959 encouraged nations to have a national authority for the standardization of geographical names and to set up a group of experienced consultants from interested governments. Since the first meeting of this group in 1960, 30 sessions have been held, with the name UNGEGN formalized in 1972. From 1967 to 2017, 11 five-yearly conferences were convened, providing forums to encourage national standardization, to promote international dissemination, and to endorse a single standardized and scientific romanization system for each non-Roman-script language.

For over 50 years, UNGEGN established a cooperative framework, followed up conference resolutions and promoted geographical names standardization, through its geographical/linguistic divisions and topical working groups, publications, website and training activities. In 2017, the time was appropriate to review the conference and session structure and working methods with a view to operational efficiencies, cost-savings and improved decision making. As a result, the conferences and UNGEGN were discontinued and a new UNGEGN was established (ECOSOC 2018/2), to be convened every two years starting in 2019, with the existing mandates. (See UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029.)



**UNEGGN**

United Nations Group of Experts  
on Geographical Names



## 6 UNGEGN VISION, VALUES AND AIMS

### Vision

Every country to have 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 to have these names easily accessible for national and international use - facilitating consistent worldwide use of geographical names to foster communication and cooperation.

### Values

Inclusive, Collaborative, Respectful, Relevant,

III. Our products and outcomes will be solution-

### Aims

- I. Raise awareness of the value and benefits of national and international geographical names standardization;
- II. Facilitate the creation or improvement of national geographical names standardization principles, policies and procedures;
- III. Recognize, respect and promote the value of geographical names as significant elements of cultural heritage, language and identity, including those of indigenous peoples and regional and minority groups;
- IV. Enhance, nationally, regionally and globally, the maintenance and dissemination of standardized geographical names data;
- V. Consider, contribute to and endorse a single standardized and scientific romanization system for each non-Roman script language; systems are proposed by donor countries, and intended for international use. Recommend methods of writing geographical names from non-written languages;
- VI. Provide an active forum for Member States to exchange information, discuss and learn of good practices on the standardization of geographical names, including their use in geographic information systems;
- VII. Provide leadership in the implementation of resolutions and recommendations adopted at the former United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names and at the sessions of the Group of Experts;
- VIII. Be recognized as the main source of expertise on a global level on standardization of geographical names for Member States;
- IX. Contribute geographical names expertise and advice to the work of other United Nations bodies, including those addressing the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, taking note of their suggestions;
- X. Collaborate with relevant non-United Nations organizations; and
- XI. Involve relevant stakeholders to contribute to the standardization of geographical names and to promote their use.



**UNGEGN**

United Nations Group of Experts  
on Geographical Names

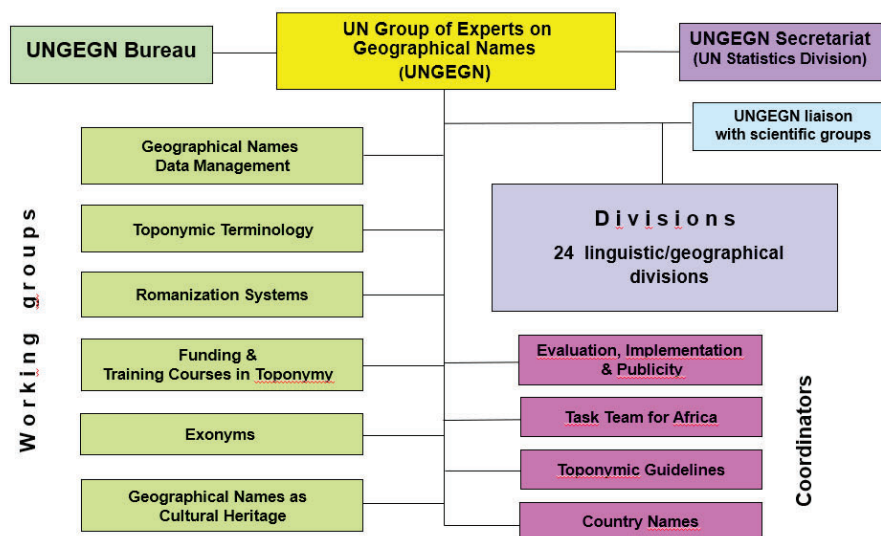


## 7 UNGEGN STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

The Group of Experts is composed of representatives of States Members of the United Nations, including experts appointed by Governments. In appointing their representatives, Member States designate experts with specific knowledge drawn from the interrelated fields of geography, cartography, geospatial information, linguistics and history.

### UNGEKN Structure

Supported by the UN Statistics Division through the UNGEGN Secretariat



**Divisions** of the Group of Experts comprise the major linguistic and geographical divisions of the world, as listed in the Appendix. Member States decide for themselves the Division(s) to which they wish to belong; some belong to more than one Division. Each Division is expected to stimulate activities in the standardization of geographical names within the Division, through technical meetings, exchange of experiences, correspondence, etc. Currently, there are 24 Divisions that guide the work of UNGEGN during and between its sessions.

#### UNGEKN Linguistic/Geographic Divisions

Africa Central	Baltic	India
Africa East	Celtic	Latin America
Africa South	China	Norden
Africa West	Dutch- and German-speaking	Pacific South-West
Arabic	East Central and South-East Europe	Portuguese-speaking



**UNGEKN**

United Nations Group of Experts  
on Geographical Names



Asia East (other than China)	Eastern Europe, Northern and Central Asia	Romano-Hellenic
Asia South-East	East Mediterranean (other than Arabic)	United Kingdom
Asia South-West (other than Arabic)	French-speaking	United States / Canada

**Working Groups** are created to follow up topics and issues which cut across the divisional structure of UNGEGN. Currently, nine Working Groups are in operation. In addition, UNGEGN has a Task Team for Africa and a Coordinator for the Toponymic Guidelines. The current work plans of these Working Groups, Task Team and Coordinator are listed in the Strategic Plan. A working group is disbanded when it has fulfilled its purposes.

**The Bureau** is composed of one chair, two vicechairs and two rapporteurs. The Bureau, Working Group convenors, coordinators and former chairs meet regularly through video conferencing or faceto-face meetings. Secretariat support for UNGEGN is provided by the UN Statistics Division.

UNGEGN is governed by its **Rules of Procedure**. They are the policies and regulations governing the meetings of UNGEGN as per ECOSOC Decision 2018/264. They constitute a set of procedures and conducts that ensures the proper functioning of meetings. All participants are obliged to respect these rules and follow the procedures. The rules address the conduct of UNGEGN sessions, the composition of the body including the Bureau and terms served, the holding of elections, the creation and operation of subsidiary bodies and the participation of observers among other important features.

The Rules of procedure are accessible at this link.

<https://www.un.org/ecosoc/sites/www.un.org.ecosoc/files/documents/2018/decision.2018.264.pdf>

### UNGEGN liaison officers

The role and importance of international organizations in contributing and exchanging information on the standardization of geographical names was recognized by the Group of Experts at its first conference in 1967. Liaison officers are responsible for ensuring optimal collaboration and promoting communication between its assigned body and the Group of Experts. The practice of submitting reports to each conference and session of the Group of Experts was mandated in Resolution V/8, adopted at the fifth Conference in Montreal Canada in 1987.

Over its long history liaison relations were created with several international organizations. The Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in 1998, recommended the establishment of a liaison with the International Organization for Standardization (Resolution VII/13). The Group went on to establish liaison with both the Unicode Consortium and the International Organization for Standardization, among others.

List of UNGEGN liaison officers is accessible here: - <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/liaison/>



**UNGEGN**






United Nations Group of Experts  
on Geographical Names

## 8 THE UNGEGN STRATEGIC PLAN AND PROGRAMME OF WORK

A strategic plan coupled with its programme of work is designed to provide a forward and focused vision, enables increased operational efficiency, directs the prioritization of tasks, serves for the effective allocation of resources and importantly, supports the alignment of an organization’s goals with that of its stakeholders. A strategic plan and programme of work were considered necessary in order to build on the advancements made in modernizing 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 on advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

[The UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work](#) was approved in May 2021 by the Group of Experts at its 2021/second session. As a living document intended to guide the work of the Group of Experts over the period 2021-2029, the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work provides a forward and focused vision, directs the prioritization of activities, allows for more effective communication within the Group of Experts and across its stakeholders, strengthens the Group’s accountability, and deepens the impact of its work.

The UNGEGN programme of work has five strategic areas, which are further broken down into 18 major objectives, supported by 51 action items. Oversight and coordination of the implementation of the Strategic Plan and Programme of Work is being done by UNGEGN vice-chairs and working group convenors, referred to as “Caring colleagues”.

	Strategies	No. of Objectives	Total Action Items
 Technical expertise	1. Technical expertise	3	10
 Relationships, links and connections	2. Relationships, links and connections	3	10
 Effective work programmes	3. Effective work programmes	4	12
 Culture, heritage and language recognition	4. Culture, heritage and language recognition	4	12
 Promotion and capacity building	5. Promotion and capacity building	4	7
	<b>5</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>51</b>

### UNGEKN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work – Strategies, Objectives and Action Items

The Group of Experts has adopted a few exemplary approaches towards implementing their Strategic Plan and Programme of Work. For example, to support awareness raising and communication efforts, a section in the UNGEGN Bulletin is used to share updates on implementation activities.



## 9 THE IMPORTANCE OF NATIONAL NAMES AUTHORITIES

### National standardization

**The goal of the United Nations is to establish usable and consistent written forms of toponyms and their applications throughout the world.** This depends heavily on the official use of names within each country.

The Group of Experts defines national geographical names standardization as ***the standardization of geographical names within the area of a national entity, such as a State*** (Glossary, 314). [Resolution I/4](#) adopted by the First United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names held in 1967 constituted one of the first efforts to establish uniform instructions for a national standardization programme. The Fifth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (1987), in its [Resolution V/15](#), urged those countries that did not yet have national geographical names authorities to proceed without delay to establish them. Based on the data available as of March 31 2016, of 193 Member States, 91 or 47% have established national geographical names authorities; further strengthening the need for continued focus on supporting their creation.

National geographical names programme is directed towards the determination and selection of the best or most appropriate names in their written form. The expression “**geographical name standardization**” applies to the dual aspect of both the written name and its reference to a place, feature or area on the surface of the Earth. It does not apply specifically to names used in speech, although spoken usage influences the written word and the written word can influence names used orally.

The Group of Experts also strongly recommends that standardized geographical names data be considered in the design of national and regional spatial data infrastructures and be included in their development and implementation.



## Resolution I/4 National Standardization (1967 Geneva)

### RECOMMENDATION A. NATIONAL NAMES AUTHORITIES

It is recommended that, as a first step in international standardization of geographical names, each country should have a national geographical names authority:

- (a) Consisting of a continuing body, or co-ordinated group of bodies, having clearly stated authority and instructions for the standardization of geographical names and the determination of names standardization policy within the country;
- (b) Having such status, composition, function and procedures as will:
  - (i) Be consistent with the governmental structure of the country;
  - (ii) Give the greatest chance of success in the national names standardization programme;
  - (iii) As appropriate, provide within its framework for the establishment of regional or local committees according to area or language;
  - (iv) Provide for consideration of the effects of its actions on government agencies, private organizations and other groups and for the reconciliation of these interests, as far as possible, with the long-range interests of the country as a whole;
  - (v) Make full use of the services of surveyors, cartographers, geographers, linguists and any other experts who may help the authority to carry out its operations efficiently;
  - (vi) Permit record keeping and publication procedures that will facilitate the prompt and wide distribution of information on its standardized names, both nationally and internationally.

It is recommended that those countries which have not yet begun to exercise their prerogative of standardizing their geographical names on a national basis should now proceed to do so.

It is further recommended that the appropriate United Nations office be kept informed by each national names authority of its composition and functions, and of the address of its secretary.

#### Why do we name places?

- i. To ensure the capacity to unambiguously identify and locate geographical entities and places, as an essential reference system for services, infrastructure and public administration.
- ii. Ensuring that the valuable record of a country's places names with its variety of sources, reflecting unique patterns of settlement is preserved and accessible.
- iii. To preserve geographical names and their variants over time, protect culture and heritage and contribute to historical information.

Therefore governments establish National Names Authorities whose central role is to authorize place names for official purposes and to issue policy guidelines on standard usage and written form and spelling. Thereby promoting effective, usable place names to provide unambiguous direction. standardization is to prom

#### Why is geographical names standardization necessary?

- i. Many places have more than one name
- ii. Many names are duplicated
- iii. Names may have variant spelling
- iv. Local name may be different to the more widely recognized international names
- v. Names in some countries cannot be written in Roman script



## RELATION OF NATIONAL STANDARDIZATION TO INTERNATIONAL STANDARDIZATION

12. To assist in differentiating between national standardization and international standardization, the Group of Experts agreed on the following definitions:

*National standardization* is the fixing by each country of the writing of the geographical names of that country in the official administrative language or languages of that country;

*International standardization* is the process by which nationally standardized names of any country are accepted by all other countries. Where for this purpose it is necessary to transliterate or transcribe from the nationally standardized forms, this conversion should be in accordance with the minimum possible number of alphabetic conventions. Although a single convention for each writing system (Roman, Cyrillic, Arabic etc.) may not be immediately attainable, agreement might be reached on the limiting of conversion into the Roman alphabet to systems based on the official United Nations languages — English, French, Spanish.

## 10 IDENTIFYING THE NEED FOR THE CREATION OF A NAMES AUTHORITY

Establishing a new programme and structure within government is often difficult given the need to identify and secure generally scarce financial resources, as governments have other perceived critical social, economic, environmental and political requirements. Therefore, strong cases have to be made to support the creation of a geographical names programme and structure. One strong argument generally used focuses on the consolidation of effort with less overall costs in geographical names collection, management and dissemination, generating consistent results and greater benefit to whole of government entities, private sector and academic institutions.

The following may be considered as steps in establishing a national names body.

- i. Identification of a national issue (economic, social, environmental) that standardized names are critical to addressing, the issue preferably relevant to governments national development priority – emergency management, transportation, census taking, management of migrants, infrastructure development, preservation of culture and heritage and maintaining sovereignty etc. Document the requirement, make the case, if possible, prepare a cost benefit analysis. Decision makers always want to know what are the costs and the benefits.
- ii. Evaluate existing government structures, the leadership, operational priorities direction and future plans of ministries and departments. Determine which body would be best suited to manage a national names body. Would it be the National Mapping Agency, the





- Office of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Culture, the National Library and archives, the Ministry of Education.
- iii. Identify partners, collaborators, the champion, at the senior executive level, with the advocacy, communication and networking skills needed to open the right doors and make the presentations and appeals needed from the ministry, to Cabinet to parliament (depending on your national governance arrangements.)
  - iv. With interest and buy in comes the need for establishing clearly defined objectives of the names authority, principles and procedures for the conduct of geographical names standardization. Standardization programmes require a clear statement of purpose. Agreement on fundamental issues by interested parties is essential at the planning stage. The following questions should be considered and answered at the outset:
    - a. What kind of names authority is best suited for the internal structure of the national Government and the political organization of the country?
    - b. What status and resources will be available for staff support to the authority and where in government will the staff reside?
    - c. What kinds of names of features will be under the purview of the national authority?
    - d. What characteristics or attributes associated with toponyms will be standardized?
    - e. How will the costs of operation and promulgation of official names be covered?
  - v. Once the goals, principles and procedures have been decided, one must obtain legal authority. This may be received via policy directive, an order, or legislation.

## 11 POLICY AND LEGISLATION TO SUPPORT THE NATIONAL NAMES AUTHORITY

Laws affect almost all aspects of our lives, they serve as guidelines for the conduct of citizens, they regulate how we transact business, access justice, protect our environment, and provide legal identity among other things and therefore, without laws there would be chaos. Laws are generally simple, concise and clear statements crafted from principles and policies; they are also agents of modernization and social change which is driven by technological advancement and different administrative arrangements.

Many will opine that to successfully manage our lives requires rules, guidelines and ultimately legislation, and so does the management of geographical names. Did you know that the United States and Canada have had Geographical Names Orders from as early as 1890 and 1897 respectively?

### A clearly stated mandate

Full and legal recognition is a critical factor in the effectiveness of a national programme. The efforts of an authority need to rely on the support and respect given not only by national and local Governments, but also by citizens throughout the country. This support depends on real powers or a real mandate given to the names authority by the Government.

A mandate should clearly define powers, mission, areas of responsibility and initial procedures for a successful programme. The decision to include or exclude certain categories of toponyms within the scope of the national authority needs to be clearly indicated.



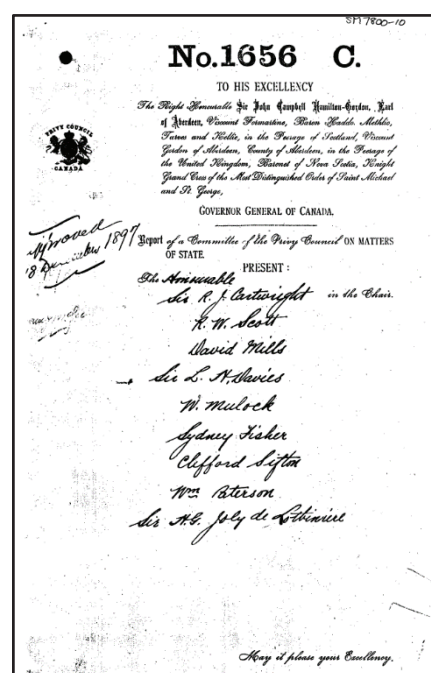
A mandate should allow a names authority to:

- i. Approve or change names, individually or in groups, together with their applications, according to prescribed policies and procedures adopted by the names authority;
- ii. Promulgate these official names and their applications for official and public use;
- iii. Publish rules to be followed by cartographers and publishers concerning the choice, spelling and application of geographical names.

Geographical names legislation is very diverse in terms of jurisdiction, composition, administration and procedures, and can take a long time to draft and enact depending on the government's policy priorities and available resources.

### Geographic Board of Canada – 1897 Order in Council

The country is being explored, new names are given which are often duplications of existing names or which are otherwise objectionable. Sometimes two or three names are applied to the same feature and with the differences in orthography are the cause of considerable confusion. In the USA where the same difficulties were experienced a number of gentlemen connected with the various map publishing departments and Bureaus formed a voluntary association for the purpose of bringing uniformity into their publications but although some good was accomplished it was soon recognized that the association would fail in its objects unless executive authority were obtained to compel the adoption in all government publication of the decisions of the association. The matter was brought to the attention of the President who issued an order making the association a "Board on Geographic Names" to whom are to be referred all unsettled questions concerning geographic names which arise in the departments and directing these departments to accept the decisions of the Board as the standard authority in such matters. Acting under this authority the US Board has been dealing not only with names in the US but also with those in Canada, deciding by what names the rivers and mountains of the Dominion shall be known and the decisions of the Board are accepted by geographers all over the world. The Minister therefore recommends that a "Geographic Board be created to consist of one member of each of the departments of the Survey, Railways and Canals, Post Office and Marine and Fisheries. Such member being appointed by the Minister of the Department of the Surveyor General of Dominion Lands. Other members as may, from time to time be appointed by Order in Council.....



## A case for Legislation on Geographical Names in Finland

In Finland there is no one national authority responsible for geographical names or any specific law that would determine who has the power to decide on different place names and their spelling, who registers the approved names and what place names the authorities should use.

The legislation on decisions for geographical names is scattered about in different Acts and inherited place names, such as the names of natural features, are not mentioned in the law at all.

The absence of any clear legislation has led to a number of problems. For example, local authorities have tried to change the names of natural features for no good reason and without jurisdiction, merged municipalities have come up with unsuccessful naming solutions, and administrative regions have been given names that are unidentifiable in the national context. The problems not only take time and money to solve, but they also threaten the preservation of the intangible cultural heritage – inherited toponyms.

The Institute for the Languages of Finland acts as an authoritative and coordinating organ in matters relating to the standardization of place names by providing guidance for administrative bodies and by checking geographical names in the Geographic Names Register of the National Land Survey. The National Land Survey of Finland has the responsibility to take care of national mapping activities and the maintenance of the national topographic data system, to support and coordinate the development of the national spatial data infrastructure and to release, publish and share map data and other data in its field of activity.

Proposals for an Act have been put forward in 1956, 1962, 1978, 1997, 2011 and 2014. There are good arguments for an Act from the perspectives of the proper functioning of society, language policy and the preservation of the intangible cultural heritage.

How can the need for an Act on geographical names and an authority to oversee the matter be justified? What should be taken into account in preparations for the Act and in its content? How will the Act have affected practical standardization work?

Extract from UNGEGN Bulletin #55

Ulla Onkamo Senior Specialist, Institute for the Languages of Finland

Woods (2004) also makes the case for the necessary role of legislation in geographic naming. He identifies 12 principles for the development and formulation of national geographic naming legislation. These are:

1. National legislation should respect and observe international law and conventions.
2. Legislation should provide for the adoption of international best practice in relation to geographical naming, with due regard for particular local conditions.
3. Legislation should aim to strengthen national identity and in particular the rights and interests of indigenous peoples, and should have regard for the important role of geographical naming in the preservation of historical and cultural heritage.
4. Legislation should provide for the establishment of a central, national geographical naming authority and for this authority to be directly responsible for the naming of all geographical features within the jurisdiction.



5. Legislation might provide for the devolution of administrative place naming to territorial authorities or other appropriate administrative bodies.
6. Legislation should provide for the central national authority to be independent of government in its decision making relating to its functions.
7. Legislation should provide for the central national authority to be representative of geographical naming interests at national and at local community level.
8. Legislation should provide for the involvement and the input of individuals, communities and indigenous peoples in the geographical naming process both at national and at local levels and for such people to have adequate opportunities to submit, or object to, proposals for new, amended or restored geographical names.
9. Legislation should ensure that place naming at the local community level is subject to, and consistent with, national standards and protocols and is well-coordinated at national level.
10. Legislation should provide for the establishment of a database, or interactive databases, containing a comprehensive list of all 'official' names within the jurisdiction of the national authority.
11. Legislation should be facilitative rather than prescriptive
12. Legislation should provide for processes that are transparent, efficient and cost effective

## 12 ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL NAMES AUTHORITY

The degree or extent of domestic/national names standardization varies considerably from one country to another. The methods used for achieving national standardization also vary considerably between countries with standardization programmes. Organization, policies and procedures vary widely. Some countries have established national names authorities to regulate most categories of names, while others distribute responsibility between two or more governmental offices according to their administrative function and goals. No one method is better than another as long as each fulfils the need of the government, and the names are accepted and agreed with local spoken and written usage.

A names standardization programme should begin carefully and not be over-organized. A small core of persons who are aware of the practical needs of the programme can work out a plan of organization, procedures and even preliminary principles and policies for national standardization. It is possible to “fine-tune” these rules to meet special conditions when experience is gained during the planning stage, and as work proceeds.

The cost of a names authority and a standardization programme need not be great. Actual cost will depend on several factors such as size and organization of an authority, number and complexity of the country's names, and necessary procedures used to achieve standardization. It is important to balance the time and money spent for national standardization with potential savings derived from the programme.

Key, essential elements for the operation of an authority are -

- i. Leadership -providing strategic direction.
- ii. Staff -job descriptions outlining required qualification and skills and deciding on numbers depending on the responsibilities based on legislation and responsibilities, given size of names standardization portfolio. Any type of national names authority depends on accurate



- information to function effectively. Obtaining information is the job of a professional staff. Such information is gathered from a variety of sources, then analysed and processed for appropriate treatment. The information is obtained from:
- a. Document research and investigation;
  - b. Scholars appointed to advise the names authority;
  - c. Support committees;
  - d. Field investigations;
  - e. Local citizens;
  - f. State, regional and local names offices.
- iii. A names committee/Board on Geographic names/national Names Advisory Council – consisting of a cross section of experts with varied backgrounds relevant to names standardization representing departments of government, academia, the private sector and civil society. Creates an environment that engenders trust, transparency and inclusion. This arrangement is readily accepted by citizens. This committee depending on its authority is generally responsible for establishing policies and making decisions.

### 13 MODELS OF NATIONAL NAMES AUTHORITIES

Institutionalization is considered to be a process of creating ‘appropriate’ routines that become habitualized or internalized as legitimate behavior, and institutional arrangements provide instruments that governments can use to facilitate this (policy) process within and/or between organizations or programs. Institutionalization here refers to formal and informal structures that aim to enhance, frame or regulate the voluntary or forced alignment of tasks and efforts of organizations in the pursuit of information management. These instruments are used to create greater coherence and to reduce redundancy and contradictions with and between policies, implementation or management.

Three mechanisms underpinning institutional arrangements (in the public sector) – with an emphasis on coordination – can be distinguished: **hierarchies, markets and networks**. Each of these mechanisms has something to contribute to understanding the causes of problems experienced in institutional arrangements, the gains to be achieved through institutional arrangements, and the mechanisms through which better institutional arrangements can be achieved. The distinction between hierarchies, markets and networks of institutional arrangements in social life is widely accepted.

In **hierarchy-based institutional** arrangements, patterns of interaction have two main drivers: authority, operationalized in administrative orders, rules and planning on the one hand, and dominance and authority as the basic control system on the other. **Market-based institutional arrangements** are based on competition, bargaining and exchange between actors. The price mechanism, incentives and self-interest of actors steer activities of different actors by creating an ‘invisible hand’. **Network-based institutional arrangements** take the form of cooperation between actors, where inter-organizational relations are ruled by the acknowledgement of mutual interdependencies, trust and the responsibilities of each actor.



## The IGIF - the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework

The objective of these strategic pathways is to guide governments towards implementing integrated geospatial information systems in a way that will deliver a vision for sustainable social, economic and environmental development.

Each strategic pathway is augmented by specific objectives to assist countries in achieving the required results. The strategic pathways are presented as separate pieces of a jigsaw puzzle in recognition that there are many aspects and dimensions to each individual pathway, and that when joined together, the Framework is connected, integrated and implemented. Figure 3 illustrates the nine strategic pathways surrounded by the benefits that are able to be realised when implemented together. For additional information on the nine strategic pathways along with specific actions, see part Part 2: Implementation Guide.

[Microsoft Word - Part 1-IGIF Overarching Strategic Framework 24July2018.docx \(un.org\)](#)

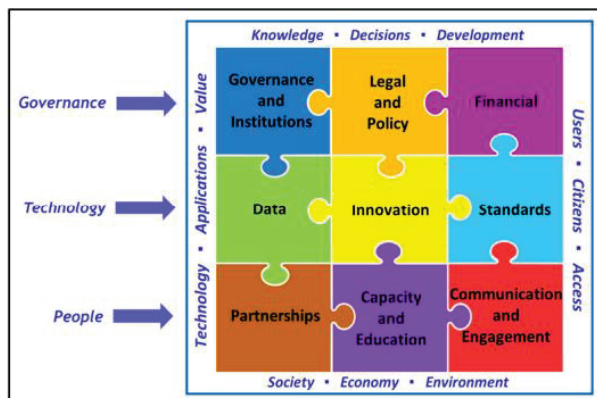
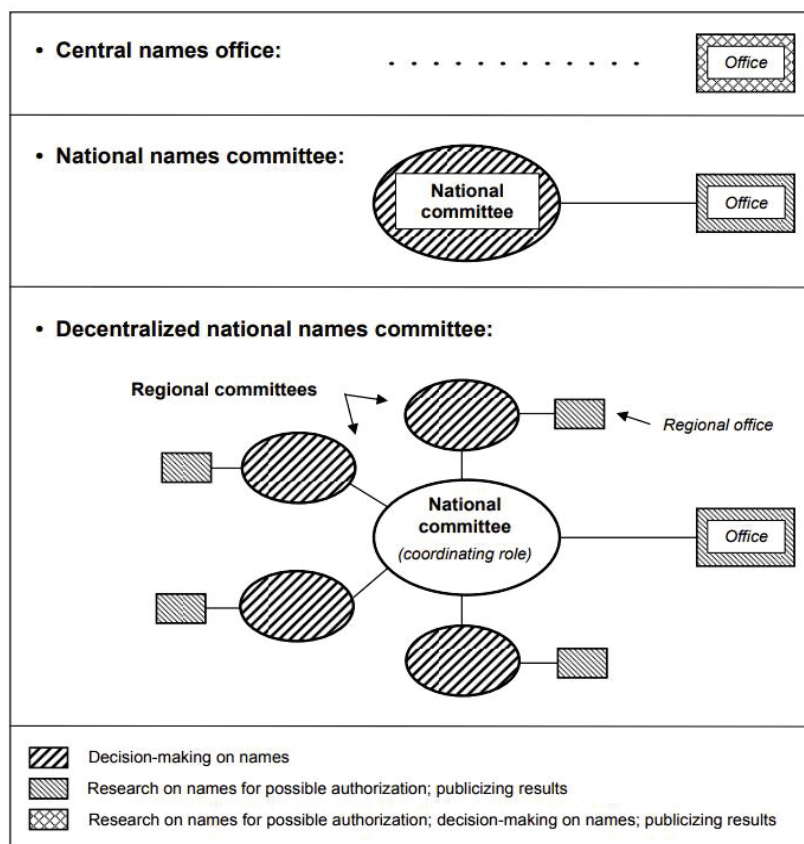


Figure 3: The Framework is anchored by nine strategic pathways and three main areas of influence. Once implemented, the strategic pathways realize many benefits.



The organization of geographical names authorities varies from country to country. Most can be classified under one of three kinds of government structures:

1. Central names office
2. National names committee (board, council, commission, etc.)
3. Decentralized names authority.

The details can differ considerably depending on how each was internally organized with regard to principles, policies and procedures. There are advantages and disadvantages connected with each approach, depending on the internal organization of a nation's government.



## Comparative table of 11 National Names Authorities

	Country	Name	Legal Instrument for the Authority	Organisation	Membership
1	Botswana	Botswana Geographical Names Commission	Established by Presidential Directive 1967	Structure being reorganised	
2	Canada	Geographical Names Board of Canada <a href="http://www.nrcan.gc.ca/earth-sciences/geography/place-names/about-geographical-names-board-canada/9174">http://www.nrcan.gc.ca/earth-sciences/geography/place-names/about-geographical-names-board-canada/9174</a>	Established under Order in Council. First created in 1897	A multi-jurisdictional national body. Chairperson appointed by Minister of Natural Resources Canada (NRCan). Secretariat services provided by NRCan	Representatives from 10 provinces and three territories, departments and agencies of federal government
3	Cyprus	Cyprus Permanent Committee for the Standardization of Geographical Names <a href="http://www.geonoma.gov.cy">www.geonoma.gov.cy</a>	Formally established by decision of the Council of Minister 1979	Permanent committee appointed by Minister of Education and Culture; with sub-committees	Cross section of place name experts - surveyors, linguist, archaeologist
4	Czechia	The Czech Commission on Geographical Names	Established in 1971	Secretariat of Commission is part of the Czech Land Survey Office.	The Commission cooperates with various institutions and individuals - linguists, onomastics etc
5	Denmark	Danish Place Name Commission <a href="http://www.stednavne.info">www.stednavne.info</a> . <a href="http://www.danmarksstednavne.dk">www.danmarksstednavne.dk</a> .	Established in 1910 and governed by Governmental Order 1978	Commission and Secretariat in the University of Copenhagen, Institute of Names Research	
6	Italy	Commission for Italian Official Toponymy	Special Decree of March 1911 replaced by law N.605 in 1949 which was repealed in 2008.	Commission created in 2011 within the Italian Geographic Military Institute	
7	Jordan	National Committee on Geographical Names <a href="http://rjgc.gov.jo/RJG.aspx?PID=282&amp;lang=en">http://rjgc.gov.jo/RJG.aspx?PID=282&amp;lang=en</a>	Created in 1984	Royal Jordanian Geographic Centre	Inter-agency members with representation from private sector
8	New Zealand	The New Zealand Geographic Board Ngā Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa <a href="http://www.linz.govt.nz/regulatory/place-names/about-new-zealand-geographic-board">http://www.linz.govt.nz/regulatory/place-names/about-new-zealand-geographic-board</a>	Operates under the New Zealand Geographic Board Act 2008	Committee and sub-committees with secretariat services provided by Land Information New Zealand	Inter-agency members with representation from private sector
9	Oman	National Survey Authority	Ministerial decision of 1983	Specialised Branch in the National Survey Authority	
10	Republic of Korea	Korea Committee on Geographical Names	Operations based on Act on the Establishment and management of Spatial Information. Committee first founded in 1980	Integrated Committee that is final authority that decides on geographical names.	
11	Spain	National Geographical Institute, Specialised Committee for Geographical Names <a href="http://www.ign.es">http://www.ign.es</a>	Royal Decree 1545/2007 - Ministry of Development	State Agencies and Autonomous Communities	Members from State administration, universities, autonomous communities, academies of languages and other toponymy related institutions.



## 14 WHAT MAKES FOR A SUCCESSFUL NATIONAL NAMES AUTHORITIES

### ACTIVITY – Why a Names Authority

Reflecting on your national situation, identify two strong arguments in support of creating a national names authority, consisting of a Director, staff for names collection, management and dissemination and the coordination of an Names Advisory Committee

