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English

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

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Item 5a of the provisional agenda *

Toponymic education

Cooperation between UNGEGN and UNMAPS

Submitted by Norway **

Summary:

The full working paper provides a proposal, with background information, which outlines possible areas in which UNGEGN can cooperate and assist UNMAPS in creating better geodata for use in UN-missions and disaster relief situations.

Three areas have been identified where UNGEGN can provide support and expertise for UNMAPS. All areas will need to be developed to meet needs internally in the United Nations system.

The author believes that it is necessary for UNGEGN to increase its relevance and provide expertise internally in the UN system.

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** Prepared by Peder Gammeltoft, Norway and Convenor of Working Groups on Toponymic Training and Publicity and Funding.

Cooperation between UNGEGN and UNMAPS

1. What is UNMAPS

UNMAPS is a geospatial initiative that aims to assist UN Peacekeeping missions by providing its peacekeepers with topographic maps, in their field endeavors, such as peace and security, navigation and logistics, to help the missions in their tactical and operational activities, as well as help countries torn by conflict to create the necessary conditions for lasting peace.

Building upon previous initiatives in which the main objective was the production of topographic maps, the United Nations Global Service Centre (UNGSC), the United Nations Geospatial Information Section in New York, and three peacekeeping missions - UNSOS, MONUSCO and MINUSCA - established in August 2019 the foundation of this new and wider global initiative.

The organization has a thriving community ranging from UN personnel in the field (GIS groups, UN offices, military and police) to academia (high schools and universities), from local communities and NGOs to any remote volunteer in the world. Remote volunteers are contributing to the mapping efforts by editing directly in OpenStreetMap, where the community is responsible for millions of edits already.

2. The 2nd UNMAPS Conference, “Building greater UN Maps Together”

The 2nd UNMAPS Conference took place in Valencia, Spain, 6th-11th March 2023. Two UNGEGN experts, Catherine Cheetham, United Kingdom, and Peder Gammeltoft, Norway attended the conference, which had almost 90 participants from 45 UN entities and external partners attending. The participants included Geospatial professionals in the United Nations, including Specialized Agencies, Funds and Programs, Academia, Donors, Member States, and other international organizations. The goal of the conference was to strengthen the coordination, collaboration and sharing mechanisms on geospatial information within the United Nations system and beyond.

The Conference theme was “Building greater UN Maps Together” and was an opportunity to explore how geospatial data and services can help to deliver the collective mandates of the United Nations such as addressing climate change, sustaining food systems, ensuring universal access to care and education, and ensuring peace and justice for all countries.

A presentation titled, *Promoting the collection, standardization, and publication of geographical names*, was given by the UNGEGN-delegates. In addition, the United Kingdom expert took part in a panel discussion on geographical names and gazetteers.

3. Areas of Cooperation

The UNMAPS Conference featured many and varied presentations, but most returned to several issues relating to the use of geographical names, namely, how to properly record, correctly – and in which way. The peacekeeping missions – as other missions – are often faced with multi-layered conflicts where language and use of language plays a role in the conflict.

Thus, the use or non-use of a certain geographical name in a specific context may be seen as problematic by one side in a conflict. In this respect, the recording efforts in conflict zones are like those of UNGEGN nations with recognized linguistic or indigenous minorities, where special efforts must be made to ensure correct recording and usage of names.

In addition, a much recurring question was availability of data and quality of available data. Recent events have shown the world community that conflicts may break out anywhere in the world and any part of the planet may be subject to peacekeeping and aid-relief efforts by the United Nations.

With these two core issues in mind, the author has identified three areas in which UNGEGN can assist the rest of the UN community.

1. **Training:** The UNMAPS community provides training in producing geodata, including training in collection and recording of geographical names. Since UNGEGN has substantial experience in providing toponymic training through its Toponymic Education program under the Working Group on Training Courses in Toponymy, this is a central area in which UNGEGN and UNMAPS can cooperate.

Toponymic training at UNMAPS is at a more universal level than the UNGEGN toponymy training courses. The training UNMAPS provide is for UN-employees employed to work at any mission needing their assistance, so courses cannot be made area specific but must be based on overall principles. Thus, cooperation in this area will entail an adaptation to concisely detailed and universal toponymic training.

2. **Collection of Geographical Names:** The collection process of geographical names in peacekeeping and relief missions vary greatly according to the actual nature of the mission and scale of conflict. Thus, a collection procedure may range from being purely recording what a given locality is named and no more, to detailed recording of a named locality in whichever language is being used and in which administrative area the locality is situated, etc.

There is, in other words a need for a standardized set of mutually upgradable (and reversible) standards for recording geographical names. A set of standards can be defined according to how much is being recorded according to mandate set by the given mission, see figure 1 below.

The benefit of such a set of standards will be of relevance for national collection of geographical names as well as for use in academic and community geographical names collection projects.

3. **Making National Geographical Names Data Available:** Recent global events and natural disasters have shown that the need for peacekeeping and aid relief may arise anywhere in the world. Granted, many conflict areas may not have governments sufficiently vested to have had national mapping agencies and geographical names authorities in place before a conflict broke out but in other cases countries with well-established standardized, national geographical names data have suddenly taken centre stage in a conflict situation. Here, the UN missions can make very good use of existing data for fulfilling their mandates. However, the core question is where to find such data – there are no repositories for global national mapping data, as are there no compilations of data access. Here UNGEGN may certainly be of assistance.

In keeping with existing recording by the UNGEGN of national names authorities, this recording could be extended to provide information about what national geographical names data are available as Open Data, and in which formats they are available for each country. This will constitute a minor extension of an existing UNGEGN activity to be implemented.

A given extension should detail which data are freely available, from which platform and in which formats (e.g. download (CSV, JSON, TXT, etc.) or through web-service (WFS, REST-API, SPARQL-endpoint, etc.)).

4. **Types of cooperation:** Depending on the level of desired cooperation between UNGEGN and other United Nations bodies, cooperation can be carried out within the existing UNGEGN structure, either through the formation of a new working group working internally within the UN system or through the formation of a task team.

Since the level of cooperation involves the activities of two existing working groups, namely Working Group on Geographical Names Data Management and the Working Group on Training Courses in Toponymy, it is possible to let one of these working groups take the lead in the cooperation, or to establish a new *Task Team for United Nations Cooperation* with participation from both working groups and interested UNGEGN participants. If a more superficial cooperation is desired, it is possible to let the cooperation be led by an UNGEGN Liaison Officer.

However, given the importance of the United Nations to have correct and up to date data, including geographical names information, in their mission work and otherwise, it appears most sensible to work towards establishing a new task team. This will ensure deeper ties with other bodies of the United Nations.

4. Points for discussion

It is hoped that this proposal is positively received by the UNGEGN and the Secretariat. The author is willing to act as consultant for further cooperation discussions with UNMAPS. In addition, possible volunteers to any of the three areas of cooperation are encouraged to come forward, providing positive support of the proposal.

5. The Group of Experts is invited to:

1. Express its views on the proposal and discuss issues raised in support or against the possible implementation of the proposal.

v1.0	v1.3	v2.0
Named feature URI	Named feature URI	Named feature URI
Feature type	Feature type	Feature type
Toponym	Toponym 1	Toponymic Expression URI
EPSG	Language 1	Toponymic Expression URI etc
X	Toponym ...	Coordinates URI
Y	Language ...	
	EPSG	
	Coordinates 1	
	Coordinate system 1	Toponymic Expression URI
	Coordinates ...	Toponymic Expression URI
	Coordinate system ...	Toponym
		Language
		Relates to URI (a)
		Relates to URI (b)
		Relates to URI etc.
		Toponym etc. ...
		Coordinates URI
		Relates to URI (a)
		Relates to URI (b)
		Relates to URI etc.
		EPSG
		Coordinates
		Coordinate system
		Coordinates etc. ...

Figure 1. Concatenated view of a possible set of standards for collecting geographical names according to the level of detail of recording in the collection process. The simplest collection standard only records a name, a feature type and a set of coordinates, whereas more detailed collection processes can collect more attribute material according to the need expressed by mission mandate.