



# UNITED NATIONS GROUP OF EXPERTS ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Advancing geographical names standardization through inclusive, culturally-informed and evidence-based solutions to support sustainable development

2025 Session | 28 April – 2 May 2025 | @UNSD\_GEGN, #2025UNEGN



## 2025 UNGEGN SESSION Side Event

### Forum on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage 1315 – 1430 April 29 to 30 - UNHQ CR-C

*“WE DECLARE TO...HONOUR, PROMOTE AND PRESERVE CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND CULTURAL HERITAGE, AS WELL AS LANGUAGES, KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS AND TRADITIONS, AND FOSTER INTERCULTURAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, INCLUDING THROUGH ENCOURAGING STRENGTHENED INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION...”*

*PACT FOR THE FUTURE , GLOBAL DIGITAL COMPACT AND DECLARATION ON FUTURE GENERATIONS  
A/RES/79/1 – SEPTEMBER 2024*

#### Background

Geographical names are more than just markers of place: they embody historical narratives, linguistic heritage, and cultural identity. Across generations, communities have preserved traditional geographical names, reflecting indigenous knowledge, migration patterns, and historical events. In a rapidly evolving and progressively more insecure world, countries must not neglect their cultural heritage, a sentiment shared by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Pact for the Future, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and other globally relevant agendas. In this respect, Member States have significant work to do in declaring, promoting, celebrating and recognising the importance of the unique connections between culture, heritage, language and geographical names.

Through its revitalised Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage, and supported by a Focus Group on Indigenous Geographical Names, the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) works to raise awareness of the importance of safeguarding geographical names as intangible cultural heritage, and to highlight the technical, economic, social, and cultural benefits of standardising geographical names as cultural heritage. Notably, at its 2023 Session, UNGEGN took decision 3/2023/15 on “Geographical names as culture, heritage and identity, including Indigenous, minority and regional languages and multilingual issues”, acknowledging the Group’s collective raised awareness of the “emotional and spiritual aspects of cultural heritage in geographical naming, which offer improved connection, identity and belonging, contributing to equitable recognition of indigenous geographical names.” Furthermore, several UNGEGN Bulletins have addressed the topic of geographical names as cultural heritage, including the most recent issue (no. 68, December 2024) which featured the theme “The role of geographical names in preserving cultural heritage.”

This two-part forum, organised by the UNGEGN Secretariat in collaboration with the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage and the Focus Group on Indigenous Geographical Names, will introduce participants to key aspects of geographical names as cultural heritage,

***This is an open side event and all are invited***

showcase the work of the Working and Focus Groups, and provide a spotlight on Indigenous geographical names.

**On Day 1 (Geographical names as cultural heritage)**, high-level speakers will set the scene, emphasising how geographical names can enable the acceleration of global development agendas and national priorities relating to cultural heritage. The Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage will also outline its progress in the past intersessional period, introducing its Global Survey on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage, and communicating key aspects of the Work Plan 2025-2027 being presented to UNGEGN at the 2025 session. The Working Group aims to galvanise participation within and beyond the UNGEGN community, including with the subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Council (such as the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues - UNPFII), Member States, and academia.

**On Day 2 (Indigenous geographical names)**, one key element of geographical names as cultural heritage will be under the spotlight: Indigenous geographical names. Under the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage, the Focus Group on Indigenous Geographical Names, led by Canada, aims to support the international recognition and promotion of the significance of geographical names that originate from Indigenous languages. It also aims to support Member States in establishing, updating or improving their operational and standardization practices related to Indigenous geographical naming. This panel will begin with a short introduction to the Focus Group and its work. Following this, two Member State representatives will present select experiences regarding Indigenous and minority language geographical names. The panel will conclude with discussion on key considerations related to Indigenous and minority language geographical names, including good practices, shared challenges, and future opportunities.

It is hoped that the exciting programme (specific details below) will inform and inspire in equal measure, and that following it, participants will consider joining the Working Group or contributing in any way they can to this vital common project.

### Agenda Day 1 – Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage

<b>Introduction (5mins)</b>	Mr Stefan Schweinfest, Director, <b>United Nations Statistics Division</b>
<b>Reducing Inequalities: Safeguarding cultural heritage beyond and across borders, languages and international governance (15mins)</b>	Ms Aluki Kotierk, Past President of Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. (NTI) and United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
<b>Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage (50mins)</b> <i>Examples and cases of good practice</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ms Ana Cristina de Rocha Berenger Resende, <b>Brazil</b></li><li>• Mr Chanda Penda, <b>Zambia</b></li><li>• Mr Sungjae Choo and Mr Jihwan Yoon, <b>Republic of Korea</b></li></ul> <i>(followed by moderated discussion by Ms Lethbridge)</i>
<b>The Revitalised Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage (10mins)</b>	Ms Emily Lethbridge, <b>Iceland</b>
<b>Closing and summary (10 mins)</b>	Mr Pierre Jaillard, Chair, UNGEGN

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## Day 2 – Indigenous Geographical Names

<b>Welcome and Introductions (15 mins)</b>	Mr Steve Westley, Executive Secretary, Geographical Names Board of Canada, <b>Canada</b>
<b>Focus Group Overview (10 mins)</b>	Ms Nicole Halseth, Senior Policy Analyst, Natural Resources Canada, <b>Canada</b>
<b>Select Member State Experiences (20 mins):</b> <i>Good practices regarding Indigenous and minority language geographical names</i>	<p>Presentation: Amplifying Indigenous Geographical Names – Mr Rafe Benli, <b>Australia</b> (10 mins)</p> <p>Presentation: Minority place-name standardization. A comparison of regulations and approaches in Europe. Mr Peter Jordan, <b>Austria</b> (10 mins).</p>
<b>Discussion (40 mins)</b>	All
<b>Closing and next steps (5 mins)</b>	Mr Steve Westley, Executive Secretary, Geographical Names Board of Canada, <b>Canada</b>

## Organisers

This Forum is organised by the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage. Points of Contact:

- Dr Emily Lethbridge (Iceland) [emily.lethbridge@arnastofnun.is](mailto:emily.lethbridge@arnastofnun.is)
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