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English

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

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Item 4 (a) of the provisional agenda *

Reports: Divisions of the Group of Experts

Report of the Portuguese-speaking Division

Submitted by the Portuguese-speaking Division **

Summary:

During the intersessional period of 2023-2025, the Portuguese-speaking Division continued to hold quarterly meetings, focusing on organizing actions to implement phase 2 of its work plan. The main objective of this phase is to enhance the dissemination of the official toponymic data of member countries and train the teams responsible for geographic names in the respective countries.

The actions carried out include improving the Division's website and publishing the official geographic names of the main administrative units of the active member countries—Brazil, Cabo Verde, and Mozambique. Additionally, aiming at capacity-building and the exchange of experiences among member countries, an online lecture series was planned for 2025, starting in May.

A significant challenge faced by the Division was the withdrawal of Timor-Leste and Sao Tome and Principe, which had been actively involved in the initial process of revitalizing the Division.

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Report of the Portuguese-speaking Division

Introduction

The report of the Portuguese-speaking Division presents the activities undertaken by the Division in the intersessional period of 2023-2025.

Activities

I. Meetings

In the intersessional period, the Portuguese-speaking Division attended 4 UNGEGN Bureau and Division Chair meetings, on 30 March and 14 November 2023 and 12 April and 15 November 2024. The Division has also confirmed participation in the next meeting on 14 March, which will take place after the elaboration of this report.

The Portuguese-speaking Division continues to hold quarterly online meetings and has had 8 encounters in the intersessional period. In all of them, Brazil, Cabo Verde and Mozambique were represented and in two of them Timor Leste attempted but failed to participate due to problems with Internet connection.

II. Status of the Plan of Work

In the end of 2022, the Division finalized Phase 1 of its Plan of Work, which consisted in the structuring of the Division, with the collection and organization of information about the Member States, alignment of knowledge based on the recommendations and best practices of the UNGEGN, preparation of the Division's Rules of Procedure, and dissemination of official basic information about the geographical names of the Member States and their geographical names, initially through a Division website.

Following the UNGEGN 2023 Session, which was particularly significant for the Portuguese-speaking Division as it marked the first time since 2007 that more than one country from the Division—namely Brazil and Cabo Verde—participated, the Division focused on implementing Phase 2 of its Plan of Work. This phase aims to train teams involved in geographical names work in Member Countries, promote the standardization of geographical names across these countries, and enhance the dissemination of official toponymic data of member countries through the website and other channels.

So far, the actions taken to achieve the objectives of phase 2 were:

1. Regarding the training of teams:

A. Translation of UNGEGN reference material:

A.1 The *Manual for the National Standardization of Geographical Names*, which provides basic information regarding the work with geographical names, was translated and is ready for publication both in UNGEGN's and in the Division's websites,

A.2 The Toponymy Training Manual was translated into Portuguese, and the document is being revised at present,

A.3 A common dictionary of terms related to geographical names used in UNGEGN texts was also developed to standardize future translations.

A contact with UN Publications is to be initiated in the period of the 2025 Session.

B. Online Seminar on Geographical Names

With the aim of raising awareness among the governments of the member countries of the Division, their educational and cultural institutions, as well as organizations dealing with geographical names and geospatial information, and promoting the exchange of experiences among the member countries, an online seminar on geographical names will be held throughout 2025. The first edition will take place on 30 May 2025, and will feature the participation of three experts in the field of geographical names and related topics, in a roundtable discussion on the theme "Geographical Names and Socioeconomic Development." The event will have the duration of two hours. Each panelist — one from Brazil, one from Cabo Verde, and one from Mozambique — will have 20 minutes for their presentation, followed by a session of questions and debates at the end of the three presentations.

Some of the expected outcomes of this initiative are the identification of best practices in urban planning, environmental management, and infrastructure using standardized geographical names; as well as the best ways to express, through the standardization of geographical names, cultural aspects such as traditions, myths, or important folkloric figures for the community's identity; in addition to the identification and dissemination of various forms of benefits of standardized geographical names.

The frequency of the seminar editions will be determined based on the public's reception of the first edition, which will be evaluated through a brief questionnaire.

A next step in this initiative is an edition of the Seminar on National Authorities, involving the exchange of experiences and the development of strategies to enable the creation of a Names Authority in Member Countries where it does not yet exist.

C. Course on Standardization of Geographical Names

The Division will request from UNGEGN an in-person course on the standardization of geographical names in Mozambique, for the countries of the Portuguese-speaking Division, with financial support for the participation of Cabo Verde and possibly Timor-Leste and Sao Tome and Principe. A dialog with the Working Group on Funding and Training Courses in Toponymy in this regard is expected to be initiated in the 2025 Session.

2. Regarding the dissemination of official toponymic data of the countries through the website and other channels:

A.Improvement of the Portuguese-speaking website, with updates of information and the inclusion of all UNGEGN publications already translated into Portuguese, along with other modifications deemed necessary.

This is an ongoing activity. So far, the Portuguese version of the papers submitted by Brazil, Cabo Verde and Mozambique to the 2023 Session and to Bulletins 66 and 68 were uploaded.

B. Comparative glossary of generic terms

Brazil, Cabo Verde and Mozambique have prepared the list of the generic terms used in their set of geographical names and a comparative glossary will be elaborated. However, the dates for the conclusion of this project were not yet established.

3. Regarding the promotion of the standardization of geographical names across member countries:

The Division intends to develop, as a group, projects that can be carried out jointly or in individual countries, aiming at the advance of the standardization of geographical names in the member countries.

Some of the projects discussed in the divisional meetings involve the standardization of names of administrative units in Brazil, a process which faces some challenges. Drawing from the experience of Cabo Verde and Mozambique, which is currently implementing a project aimed at standardizing the names of intermediate units in the organization of its territory, as well as the names of their physical/natural boundaries, such as rivers, streams, lagoons, etc., while collecting the stories behind the names, preserving and valuing the identity and cultural heritage of the diverse peoples that make up the country.

Another proposal involves collaboration among member countries' staffs, both in fieldwork and in the office to develop procedures for surveying and standardizing names of rivers, drawing on Brazil's experience. This is important due to the challenges in standardizing river names, as they often change along their course.

A significant and substantive project currently in discussion aims to enhance the role of the Portuguese-speaking Division in the treatment and standardization of geographical names in the VOLP (Orthographic Vocabulary of the Portuguese Language), developed within the *Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa* – CPLP (Community of the Portuguese-speaking countries). Mozambique has made initial contact with the convenor of VOLP, which has been well-received. This project is to be initiated with the compilation of a list of country and capital names as used in the Portuguese-speaking countries involved in the Division (Brazil, Cabo Verde and Mozambique), with a focus on exonyms. The first stage of this work will focus on compiling the names of African countries. The goal is to establish the criteria recommended by UNGEGN for the standardized use of geographical names, including exonyms.

A secondary objective is to raise the profile of the Portuguese-speaking Division and encourage the participation of additional Portuguese-speaking countries.

The primary challenge faced by the Division in implementing these projects is securing funding, and contacts with international and national institutions for this purpose are being sought after.

III. Other activities

1. Promotion of UNGEGN's work

In alignment with Strategies 2-i, 5-i, and 5-ii of the UNGEGN SP&PoW 2021-2029, in November 2023, the representative of Brazil, participated in the Meeting of National Statistical Institutes of Portuguese-speaking countries, held at the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) in Rio de Janeiro. During the event, she delivered a presentation on the importance of standardizing geographical names and the role of UNGEGN and the Portuguese-speaking Division, aiming to promote the work of UNGEGN and establish contacts to bring more Portuguese-speaking countries into the Division.

2. Support in the revitalization of the WG GNCH

In support of the UNGEGN Bureau's efforts to revitalize the WG GNCH, one expert from Brazil and one expert from Mozambique are taking part in the Incubator Group for the revitalization of the Working Group.

Changes in the Portuguese-speaking Division

On 29 May 2024, Ana Cristina Resende, the representative of Brazil, was elected Chair, succeeding José Jorge Mahumane of Mozambique. Alex Andrade, the representative of Cabo Verde, was elected Vice-Chair, succeeding the Brazilian representative. Additionally, on the same date, the role of Secretary of the Division was established, and Paulino Bata, the representative of Mozambique, was elected to the position. In accordance with the Division's Rules of Procedure, these representatives will serve a two-year term, starting from 27 June 2024.

Challenges

The difficulty in contacting certain members, which led to the withdrawal of Timor-Leste and São Tomé and Príncipe from divisional activities, remains a significant challenge for the Division. Several strategies were discussed to facilitate and encourage Timor-Leste's participation, as their attempts to attend multiple meetings were unsuccessful. However, no viable solutions were identified.

Additionally, the challenges related to securing funding will need to be addressed with greater urgency by the Division.