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English

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**United Nations Group of Experts on  
Geographical Names  
2025 session**

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Item 4 (b) of the provisional agenda\*

**Reports: Governments on the situation in their countries  
and on progress made in the standardization of geographical names**

## **Report of the Republic of Korea**

Submitted by the Republic of Korea\*\*

### **Summary**

This report outlines the Republic of Korea's advancements in the standardization and management of geographical names over the past two years (2023–2024), with a focus on initiatives led by the National Geographic Information Institute (NGII) and the Korea Hydrographic and Oceanographic Agency (KHOA). During this period, the NGII announced 1,987 geographical names standardized by the Korea Committee on Geographical Names (KCGN) or local geographical names committees. KHOA also conducted a survey in the coastal area of Gangwon-do, announcing 40 undersea feature names after reviews from the advisory and deliberation committees.

The NGII has made significant efforts to enhance geographical names policies, including amending legal frameworks to facilitate the participation of younger generations in the decision-making process. It has also strengthened international cooperation with organizations such as the Pan American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH) and UNGEGN. Additionally, the NGII has expanded education for local naming authorities and increased public engagement through the creation of promotional videos and infographics. The NGII has developed a comprehensive database of detailed attribute information for geographical names, with a particular focus on the Seoul Metropolitan Area.

KHOA has used detailed bathymetry data of the coastal area to identify the precise information on geographical features, conducting humanistic research such as the origin and the use of marine geographical names by local people to preserve them as cultural heritage. Furthermore, KHOA has developed the SCUFN Operation Web Service (SCUFN OWS) in an effort to support for systematic registration and management of international undersea feature names by the Sub-Committee on Undersea Feature Names (SCUFN), a subordinate body of the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC).

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\*\* Prepared by the National Geographic Information Institute, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport and the Korea Hydrographic and Oceanographic Agency, Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries (Republic of Korea).

## **Report of the Republic of Korea<sup>1</sup>**

The National Geographic Information Institute (NGII) of the Republic of Korea serves as the national mapping agency under the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport. It is responsible for developing the nation's policies on geographical names and executing out official tasks related to these names. The NGII functions as the secretariat of the Korea Committee on Geographical Names (KCGN), the principal decision-making body for geographical names, supported by a sub-committee system for specialized deliberations. Its primary responsibilities include the standardization and preservation of geographical names, conducting research and educational initiatives, fostering international cooperation, and promoting awareness of geographical names as cultural and historical assets.

The Korea Hydrographic and Oceanographic Agency (KHOA) is a subordinate agency of the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries, tasked with nautical charts production based on hydrographic survey, the standardization and management of marine geographical names. KHOA makes an official announcement of names after collecting opinions from the Advisory Committee on Marine Geographical Names and reviews from the Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Development Committee.

Both NGII and KHOA are responsible for the standardization and preservation of geographical names, conducting research and educational initiatives, fostering international cooperation, and promoting awareness of geographical names as cultural and historical assets.

Over the past two years, the NGII and KHOA have taken the lead in various geographical names projects, the key outcomes of which are summarized below.

### **1. Standardization, Operation and Management of Geographical Names by the NGII**

#### **1.1. The Standardization of Geographical Names, 2023-2024**

In 2023 and 2024, the NGII and local municipalities standardized a total of 1,987 natural and artificial geographical names, with 809 names standardized in 2023 and 1,178 in 2024. This achievement resulted from the review of 976 names by the KCGN and 1,260 names by its sub-committee. Throughout this period, the KCGN convened a total of 12 meetings, complemented by 10 sub-committee meetings.

#### **1.2. Alignment with the UNGEGN's Strategic Plan**

In alignment with the five strategies outlined in the UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029, the NGII identified 17 actionable projects, as [reported in the 2023 session](#), and has actively pursued these initiatives. Progress has been achieved in seven of these projects, as detailed in the appendix.

Leveraging the organization's capacities, the NGII has updated details of these 17 projects, adjusted timelines, and identified new research topics to ensure the plan remains current and relevant.

#### **1.3. Policy Improvement**

In September 2024, the National Geographic Information Institute (NGII) amended and enforced

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<sup>1</sup> This paper pertains to the UNCSGN resolutions IX/7 (Dissemination of information concerning the origin and meaning of geographical names), I/4 (National standardization), V/6 (Promotion of national and international geographical names standardization programs), and recommendation 2019/R/2 (Review preparations and submission of country reports).

the “Enforcement Decree of the Act on the Establishment and Management of Spatial Data” to permit the inclusion of youth representatives as official members of the KCGN. This change in the legal framework aligns with the government’s broader initiative to enhance youth participation in policy-making processes. In the Republic of Korea, "youth" is defined as individuals aged between 19 and 34, as stipulated in Article 3(1) of the "Framework Act on Youth."

By lowering the eligibility threshold, which previously required a minimum of five years of experience in academia or research, the KCGN has opened its membership to qualified youth. This progressive amendment allows individuals with either a bachelor’s degree in a toponymy-related field or at least one year of experience at a research institution to serve on the Committee, with a minimum of 10% of civilian expert seats reserved for youth. Consequently, in February 2025, a youth member was officially appointed for the first time in the history of the KCGN.

## **1.4. International Cooperation on Geographical Naming**

### **1.4.1. Operation of the Resolutions and Recommendations Database**

Since 2009, The NGII has maintained a searchable database containing the resolutions of the United Nations Committee on Geographical Names (UNCSGN) and recommendations of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN). The database is designed to facilitate the referencing of resolutions and recommendations by experts by enhancing their readability. The language versions have expanded from English to include French, Spanish, Korean and Arabic.

Three recommendations adopted at the 2023 session have been added to this database in all five languages. Additionally, the numbering system for recommendations adopted since 2019 has been re-fined to include the session year, an 'R' to signify recommendations, and a new column indicating the numbers assigned by the UN ECOSOC. To date, a [the database](#) services 211 UNCSGN resolutions and 12 UNGEGN recommendations.

### **1.4.2. Engagement with International Organizations on Geographical Names**

In September 2024, the Chair of the UNGEGN and the Secretary-General of the Pan American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH) visited the NGII. During discussions with the UNGEGN Chair, experiences regarding the management of geographical name systems in Korea and France, as well as the procedures and standards for romanizing foreign geographical names, were shared. The Secretary-General of PAIGH expressed appreciation for the capacity-building programs provided by the NGII and discussed strategies for the dissemination and distribution of the Spanish edition of the National Atlas of Korea.

Additionally, representatives from the NGII attended the PAIGH annual meetings as a permanent observer, participating in the 24th General Assembly in November 2023 in the Dominican Republic and the 25th General Assembly in November 2024 in Santiago, Chile. At these meetings, the NGII shared the outcomes of its capacity-building programs and introduced the National Atlas of Korea.

## **1.5. Management of Training Courses on Geographical Names**

Since 2023, the NGII has developed and operated training courses on geographical names for domestic public officials. The objective is to ensure that local municipality officials have a precise understanding of the geographical naming system, thereby supporting their duties in the field. The course covers topics such as geographical names standardization systems and legislation, research methodologies for geographical names, strategies for promoting geographical names, and international cooperation on geographical names. The program spans a total of 35 hours over five days. In 2023, 38

participants completed the course, with 57 participants completing it in 2024.

In addition, since 2021, the NGII has conducted capacity-building programs for PAIGH member countries, continuing through 2023 and 2024. This program offers lectures on geographical names and spatial information policies, current service statuses, land satellite technology, historical maps of Korea, and the publication of the National Atlas of Korea. It also facilitates presentations and exchanges on the geographical naming systems of various PAIGH member countries. In 2023, 18 participants from 16 countries attended, followed by 19 participants from 17 countries in 2024.

### **1.6. Outreach and Promotion of Geographical Names**

The NGII places great importance on raising public awareness and understanding of geographical names. During this period, two significant initiatives were undertaken.

Firstly, a documentary film titled "To My Name" (Korean: '이름에게') was produced and distributed via [YouTube](#) to enhance public understanding of geographical names. The film aims to highlight the cultural and historical heritage encapsulated in geographical names. In recognition of the 80th anniversary of Korea's Liberation in 2025, the documentary focused on Haebangchon (해방촌), a name associated with liberation. "Haebangchon (*haebang* means liberation and *chon* means village)" refers to immigrant residential areas established by settlers and refugees following Korea's Liberation in 1945 and the Korean War in 1950, with more than 15 such areas existing nationwide. The documentary seeks to foster public empathy for the historical significance, contemporary relevance, and cultural heritage value of geographical names, as well as their role in connecting generations. It is hoped that this initiative will stimulate national interest in geographical names.

Secondly, infographics related to geographical names were produced and disseminated. Notably, a year-long project in 2023 titled "Today's Name: Geographical Names 365" (Korean: '오늘의 지명: 지명 365') focused on promoting one name each day, selected from those determined and announced by the KCGN. Additionally, infographics on topics such as the "United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names" and "Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage" were created. These efforts aim to enable the general public to easily understand international discussions on geographical names and appreciate their cultural heritage value.

Further details of these two initiatives can be found in a separate working paper and a virtual poster presented during this session.

### **1.7. Initiative for Building Geographical Names Attribute Information**

The NGII has embarked on a project to develop a comprehensive system for providing reliable and user-friendly geographical names information by accurately documenting key attribute information such as the origins and locations of geographical names. The attribute information includes the origins of the name, specifications if it involves an artificial feature, sources of information, and characteristics of the features.

The project was initiated in 2020 by dividing the nation into regions, with the work on the Seoul Metropolitan Area almost completed in 2024. As a result, the attributes of a total of 27,132 geographical names were investigated. After verification, 21,618 were finalized and entered into the geographical names database.

This database is expected to serve as a rich resource for content related to geographical names, providing foundational data for the central government and local municipalities to manage, promote, and determine geographical names. This initiative not only enhances the reliability of geographical

naming policies and projects but also naturally strengthens the cooperation framework between the central government and local municipalities during the project's implementation.

### **1.8. Research on the Guidelines for Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage**

In 2024, the NGII sponsored research aimed at developing a set of guidelines to emphasize the protection of geographical names as cultural heritage. This initiative was launched to tackle the growing challenges in geographical name standardization, such as the erosion of heritage due to urbanization, political shifts, and modernization. The research of these guidelines are designed to offer a flexible and systematic approach for incorporating cultural heritage considerations into official geographical naming policies and academic research. They are grounded in previous resolutions in 2012 which established criteria for recognizing geographical names as cultural heritage.

Further details can be found in a separate working paper presented during this session.

## **2. Standardization and management of marine geographical names by the KHOA**

### **2.1. Standardization and Database Management of Marine Geographical Names (UNGEKN Strategic Plan 1)**

#### **1) Standardization of Marine Geographical Name Review Process**

For the standardization of marine geographical names, KHOA conducted a survey in the area of Gangwon-do from 2023 to 2024. During this period, 40 undersea feature names were officially registered. In an attempt to accurately identify and keep consistency in naming generic terms to undersea feature names, KHOA has used detailed bathymetry data to identify the precise size, shape, and bathymetric characteristics of undersea features since 2023. At the same time, humanistic research such as the origin and the use of undersea feature names by local people has also been conducted. KHOA has recorded and managed the analysis information based on detailed bathymetry data in the administrator DB.

Additionally, KHOA conducted a scientific study analyzing the scope and shape of indented marine features in order to set up standards for defining spatial boundaries and divisions of indented marine feature names, such as 'Bay,' 'Bight,' 'Gulf,' and 'Cove.' The study had standards suitable for domestic geographical features put in place, however, which showed differences in perception from local residents who actually recognize and name geographical features. To facilitate the registration of indented marine feature names in the future, it is necessary to have a sophisticated process for setting up the scope of indented marine feature names, including for historical background research, social discussions and agreements.

#### **2) Database Development and Management**

The marine geographical name database managed by KHOA is composed of two DBs: an administrator database that includes both registered and unregistered names and a public database based on standardized registered names. The administrator database contains not only basic information such as geographical names, origins, and locations but also detailed feature descriptions (minimum depth, maximum depth, total height, size, etc.), geometry, survey data (date of survey, equipment, etc.), and registration details. This ensures the management of detailed information on geographical names. The public DB can be accessible through the KHOA website to provide such information to the public.

## **2.2. International Liaison for the Standardization of Marine Geographical Names (UNGEGN Strategic Plan 2)**

KHOA has continued to engage in international cooperation with international organizations for the management of marine geographical names by providing technical support to the Sub-Committee on Undersea Feature Names (SCUFN), a subordinate body of the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC). KHOA has developed the SCUFN Operation Web Service (SCUFN OWS) in an effort to help facilitate the international standardization process of undersea feature names, providing the IHO with technical support and system enhancement for efficient operation. The SCUFN OWS is a Web GIS-based system that supports easy access to international undersea feature proposal information, images, online meeting reviews, and archive management. This integrated system was first introduced at the meeting in Brazil in 2015 and was also used at the 37th SCUFN meeting in 2024. Countries around the world have tested the system, with new functions added and improved to meet the needs. In 2024, tests were conducted to upload proposals through OWS, leading to its official use from 2025.

Support for the integrated SCUFN system also contributes to achieving the UN SDGs through international liaison for the standardization of marine geographical names. Specifically, it contributes to Goal 14 by enabling the sustainable management and utilization of marine resources using web services for the archive management of marine geographical names and to Goal 17 by reducing meeting durations, improving management efficiency, and fostering partnerships among expert groups.

## **2.3. Improvement of Legal Framework (UNGEGN Strategic Plan 3)**

The standardization and management of geographical names are essential national tasks that require the improvement of legal and institutional frameworks to ensure objectivity, consistency, and equity. It is also necessary to actively review and refine the principles for establishing and modifying geographical names. In this regard, KHOA has improved regulations to ensure objectivity and consistency in establishing and modifying geographical names by revising a field survey form and a name proposal form added with detailed bathymetry data.

Currently, the fourth edition of the Guideline for Standardization of Marine Geographical Names has been published. This includes an updated field survey form as high-resolution bathymetric charts are used for field surveys, methods for analyzing sea surface names, and guidelines for drawing up a proposal. Furthermore, based on the Standardization of Undersea Feature Names (B-6), KHOA has come up with a system for generic terms tailored for domestic circumstances to ensure consistency in generic terms, and it has been added to the Guideline for Standardization of Marine Geographical Names.

## **2.4. Establishing the Status of Endonyms as Cultural Heritage in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) (UNGEGN Strategic Plan 4)**

The core values of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) are placed on the elimination of inequality and the sustainability of resource use, based on peace and inclusiveness. To achieve these values, the UN SDGs put emphasis on strengthening cooperation among various stakeholders. The 2021–2029 UNGEGN Strategic Plan also envisions geographical names as cultural heritage serving as a medium in the course of stepping up such cooperation. Interest in geographical names as cultural heritage has been on the rise in the Republic of Korea. Endonyms related to regional cultures are one of key interests, with active discussions and practical actions put in place, particularly in specific regions.

The survey on marine geographical names in the waters of Gangwon-do of Korea in 2023 and 2024 found generic terms in the regional language, which are ‘-seonge,’ ‘-daengi,’ ‘-naegi,’ and ‘-jjam’ meaning underwater rocks (Reef, ‘Cho’ in Korean). Although these regional generic terms are not widely used at the national level, they have been preserved in the form of ‘specific term + generic term’ in the coastal region of Gangwon Province. Its exemplary cases include geographical names such as Gundanseonge, Seopdaengi, Naksannaegi, Saetbaramnaegi, and Sangbogijjam.

The Republic of Korea has preserved endonyms by incorporating regional generic terms into specific terms to name geographical names, aimed at preserving and raising awareness of geographical names as cultural heritage.

Research and surveys on specific terms reflecting the regional language have been conducted to preserve endonyms. This process is based on close cooperation with local residents and puts evidence-based solutions from field surveys and literature reviews before anything else.

## **2.5. Promotion and Education on Key Achievements in the Standardization of Marine Geographical Names (UNGEGN Strategic Plan 5)**

KHOA has produced two promotional videos to recently upload on its YouTube channel, aiming to raise awareness of marine geographical names. Additionally, KHOA has created two mascots together—‘Haeni’ and ‘Toni’—to help the public feel familiar with marine geographical names. They represent the ocean and undersea features, respectively. These characters will actively perform in various promotional activities for marine geographical names.

### **Points for discussion:**

The Group of Experts is invited to:

- (a) Take note of the report and progress made by the Republic of Korea; and
- (b) Express its views on the applicability of geographical names standardization projects of the Republic of Korea and its implications for the strategic plan and objectives of UNGEGN.

## **APPENDIX. Implementation of the UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029 by the Republic of Korea**

In alignment with the five strategies of the UNGEGN Strategic Plan, the Republic of Korea has identified and is actively pursuing 17 actionable projects. Progress has been made in the following seven projects (brackets represent action items of the UNGEGN Strategic Plan):

- Project 2-2: Establishing networks among UNGEGN participating organizations
  - A network is being built with the Korean National Commission for UNESCO to enhance the recognition of geographical names as cultural heritage **(2-i-4)**.
- Project 2-3: Promoting geographical names as intangible cultural heritage
  - A research has been conducted on guidelines for geographical names as cultural heritage. Details will be reported to the 2025 session **(4-i-2)**.
- Project 2-4: Continuing collaboration with PAIGH in the field of geographical names
  - A capacity-building program was organized in September 2023 and September 2024 with participation of 18-19 experts each **(2-ii-6, 5-i-2)**.
- Project 3-2: Research and database management of UN standardization resolutions and recommendations
  - An updates to the database was completed with three recommendations adopted in the 2023 session. The numbering system for recommendations has been refined **(3-ii-6)**.
- Project 3-3: Identification and training of experts in the field of geographical names
  - A new legislation was enacted that allows the participation of youth members in the Korea Committee on Geographical Names (Article 87 the Enforcement Decree of the Act on the Establishment and Management of Spatial Information) **(5-i-2)**.
- Project 5-1: Enhancing international promotion of Korean geographical names and database
  - A catalogue of the publications and online services for geographical names, titled *Place Names: Key to Geographical Information* was published by the National Geographic Information Institute and distributed at the 2023 UNGEGN session. An updated version will be distributed at the 2025 session **(5-i-2)**.
- Project 5-2: Development of online/offline training programs for geographical names administrators
  - A lecture titled "Stories of Korean Geographical Names" was organized and delivered as part of the sessions of the "Spatial Information Convergence Talent" program operated by the Land Transport Human Resources Development Institute in 2023 and 2024 **(5-iii-5)**.