

28 March 2025

English

---

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

**2025 session**

New York, 28 April – 2 May 2025

Item 4(b) of the provisional agenda \*

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

**National Report of South Africa**

Submitted by South Africa

---

\* GEGN.2/2025/1.

\*\* Prepared by South African Geographical Names Council (SAGNC)

## BACKGROUND

The founding principles in the names standardization (naming of geographical features) to achieve redress, transform and restore indigenous peoples dignity are in the Preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996, the National Heritage Resources Act 25 of 1999 and the South African Geographical Names Act 118 of 1998, which are;

Preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa.

*A “We, the people of South Africa,*

*Recognise the injustices of our past;*

*Honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land;*

*Respect those who have worked to build and develop our country; and*

*Believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity.*

*We therefore, through our freely elected representatives .... heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights”*

The founding provisions of the Constitution promote, “... *human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms*”.

In establishing and acknowledging the correctness in the orthography of a proposed name change, Section 6.2 (Languages) in the Constitution recognises *the historically diminished use and status of the indigenous languages* of our people and that the state must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages. (Constitution of South Africa)

Municipalities at local government level are an important stakeholder in the name application process. As such they play a critical role at the interface with local communities and assists with public consultation and ensure their Constitutional mandate is achieved, i.e. “S6.3(b) *Municipalities must take into account the language usage and preferences of their residents.*”

The National Heritage Resources Act No. 25 of 1999 “*empowers civil society to nurture and conserve their heritage resources so that they may be bequeathed to future generations and to lay down general principles for governing ... throughout the Republic*” in the form of legislation, i.e. SAGNC Act 118 of 1998 (*my addition*).

The South African Geographical Names Council Act 118 of 1998 *establishes a permanent advisory body to advise the Minister* responsible for Sport, Arts and Culture on the *transformation and standardisation of geographical names in South Africa for official purposes* and establishes provincial committees which are critical in the names standardisation process.

## SUMMARY

Below is the total number of name applications that were approved by the Minister for standardisation and were gazetted over the respective years;

2021: 36

2022: 37

2023: 18

2024: 44

The SAGNC has indeed made strides in transforming the spatial legacy of apartheid, despite resistance from some sections of certain communities. There remain many opportunities to further transform the legacy of colonialism and apartheid through standardisation of naming geographical features as per the Constitution, “*Honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land*”.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommended naming geographical features after struggle veterans as a form of restorative justice for the role they played in the attainment of democracy in South Africa.

This names standardisation mandate is funded by the South African government from the national fiscus and budgeting in the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture.

The following are notable names of liberation struggle veterans and geographical features (caves) they are named after which are of national historical significance;

No.	Name	Historical significance
1.	Mrs Winnie Madikizela Mandela.  Change of town name from Brandfort to Winnie Mandela in the Free State.	Mrs Mandela a politician and anti-apartheid activist of international stature. She was a wife to the first democratic President of the Republic of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, and is a former President of the ANC Women's League. She served as a Minister in the first democratic Parliament of South Africa. Mrs Mandela was banished into the town of Brandfort by apartheid government. The town is now named after her.
2.	Mr Duma Nokwe.  Change of road name from Houtkop Road (R54) to Duma Nokwe Road (R54)	Duma Nokwe was a political activists, a stalwart and a legislator. He is the former secretary of the ANC from 1958 – 1969. Born on the 13th of May 1927 in Evaton, died in Lusaka on the 12th of January 1978.
3.	Name spelling correction from Mapoch Cave to IRholo lakwaMabhoko.	Caves named after the former Ndzundza Ndebele Chief Mabhoko Chief Mabhoko of the Ndzundza amaNdebele (whom the Boers referred to as Mapoch) ruled until his death in 1865. During his rein in 1845, Mabhokho moved the Ndzundza capital from eMrholeni into the caves of KoNomtjarhelo and established a virtually impenetrable fortress. When he died, Nyabela became regent. During 1892–1893 King Nyabela fought what is known as the Mapoch War against the Boers. In 1968, the then Minister of National Education, Johannes De Klerk proclaimed the Mapoch Caves a Historial Monument.
4.	Hosi (King) Chavani-Wa- Mhinga  Change of name from Botsoleni which was derived from an apartheid name Boslyn meaning a bush line dividing boers (white farmers) and black people.	Chavani was the first son of Hosi Shilungwa Mhinga I of the Mhinga Traditional Council, who became Hosi (King) after his father's death.

## **SA COUNTRY NATIONAL REPORT**

In accordance with the provisions set out in resolution V/7 of the Fifth United and the Nations Conference on the Standardisation of Geographical Names, the South African Geographical Names Council (SAGNC) hereby submits the South Africa 2025 country national report.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

As aligned with the 6<sup>th</sup> session of UNGEGN and the laws in the Republic of South Africa, the SAGNC was established by an Act of Parliament through legislation, i.e. the South African Geographical Names Act of 1998 (Act No. 118 of 1998) as a legislation instrument for names standardisation.

## **POST-GAZETTING PROCESS**

Post-gazetting refers to a process after names that have been approved by the Minister, gazetted and implemented. Implementation refers to change in public signage on the roads and state buildings, i.e. signage boards on public roads and public entities be changed and bear a new name.

This is in line with Section 2(2)(e) of the SAGNC Act which states that one of the objectives of Council is *“to ensure the implementation of standardised geographical names in South Africa”*.

Towards the end of year 2024, the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture together with the Council of SAGNC convened a stakeholders’ engagement session. The objective was to secure support and buy-in from the state public entities who have a mandate to implement the gazetted names, i.e. in order to effect the change signage on public roads, state buildings, human settlements, towns and villages.

Additional strategic partners are being identified and will be consulted on an ongoing basis with regards to the implementation of gazetted names.

## **SOUTH AFRICAN GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES DRAFT AMENDMENT BILL 2023**

Serious gaps were identified in the current legislation which led to frivolous objections and gazetted names appealed in courts of law.

The proposed amendments in the Bill seeks to (amongst others), empower Ministers in nine provincial governments to establish a provincial committees with delegated powers, appoint members through a public nomination process and establish an independent Ministerial Appeals Tribunal which will adjudicate all appeals.

A nationwide public consultation process on the Draft Bill is underway across all provinces to solicit inputs and comments, which is a legislative requirement when amending legislation. A Technical Team will be established to review and assess public comments received and present the amendments from the public consultations process, before a portfolio committee in Parliament.

## **COMPOSITION OF COUNCIL**

As guided by the SAGNC Act 118 of 1998, Council consists of no fewer than 15 and no more than 25 members, with representatives from all nine provinces and public entities, i.e. South African Post Office, Chief Directorate: Surveys and Mapping, Pan South African Language Board and Statistics SA.

The Chairperson of Council is appointed by the Minister who serves as the spokesperson. The deputy chairperson is nominated by members from amongst themselves.

## **CAPACITY BUILDING AND PUBLIC AWARENESS**

Council undertakes capacity building and community based public awareness campaigns every quarter. The events are synchronised to take place when Council meeting is held in a respective province.

The objective is to strengthen internal capacity of the provincial committee members in understanding the SAGNC application and governance processes. The objective of public awareness is to raise awareness and inform the public about the names standardisation process whose objective is to erase offensive and colonial names that do not reflect local community values and the name application process. The audience for public awareness includes municipality representatives, traditional leadership, community leaders and interested and affected parties.

## **SOUTH AFRICAN GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES SYSTEM (ONLINE DATABASE ON THE SAGNS SYSTEM)**

The Department and SAGNC continue to manage the online names application system and database of gazetted names (data management system) which was launched in September 2022, in compliance with section 6(2)(b) of the SAGNC Act.

The SAGNC GIS Solution is based on ArcGIS software while the SAGNS is stored in the MS SQL Relational Database Management System (RDBMS), within a single enterprise geodatabase. The geodatabase contains all relevant SAGNC data items, along with supplementary datasets obtained. Data stored within this database is served out to the web via web services. The system can be accessed in any browser through this to the URL: <https://www.sagns.gov.za>.

## **NATIONAL GEOSPATIAL INFORMATION UNIT (NGI) IN THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, LAND REFORM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **National Geospatial Information (Dept: Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development)**

The South African National Mapping agency known as the Chief Directorate: National Geospatial Information (Land Survey Act 8 of 1997) is responsible for the creation and updating of spatial information (topographically significant features are collected and shown on the national map series).

The organization is in a unique position to be able to collect on-the-ground information during the cyclical process of updating the map series. The primary data collection is for the 1:50 000 map series. Smaller scale maps are updated as part of a related revision cycle (1:250 000, 1:500 000, Provincial maps, as well as the 1: 2 000 000 country map) based on the field and compilation information relating to the 1:50 000 map series.

All name changes are implemented as part of the revision process for inclusion in the next edition map during the process in map updating.

In addition to the hard copy map, CD: NGI distributes the topographical data from its iTIS database (Integrated Topographical Information System). An electronic database of names is part of the map data dataset. This feature class / layer is updated immediately on notification that a name has been changed / corrected, and all related gazetting objections have been dealt with. As many organizations use the CD: NGI datasets as source material to their own mapping endeavors, this results in revised names being semi-automatically distributed.

CD: NGI is committed to assisting the SAGNC with the transformation of the heritage landscape by providing expertise to the Council on an ongoing basis.

**Statistics South Africa (Stats SA)**

Statistics South Africa's Chief Geography Directorate is responsible for sourcing, updating, and disseminating the Geographical names database. This is done in line with the legal mandate derived from the Statistics Act (Act No. 6 of 1999), which tasks the statistical organization with the duty of collecting, producing and disseminating official statistics, including periodic national population censuses (RSA, 1999).

Through the interdepartmental interaction with the Department of Sports Arts and Culture, Stats SA is playing a meaningful role in making sure that the mission of the South African Geographical Names Council, as captured in the SAGNC handbook and Section 2(2)(e) of the SAGNC Act no 118 of 1998, of the standardization of geographical names to redress, correct and transform the Geographical naming system in South Africa is realized through the updating and implementation of newly standardized names (RSA, 1998; DSAC, 2022). Through this cooperation, the council's work is implemented and published per release of Stats SA's Geospatial frame to allow easy identification and comparison of data over the years within a geographical area.

Republic of South Africa (1999). Statistics Act No 6 of 1999. Pretoria, Government Printer.

Republic of South Africa (1998). South African Geographical Names Council Act No 118 of 1998. Pretoria, Government Printer.

Department of Arts and Culture (2022) South African Geographical Names Council (SAGNC): Handbook on Geographical Names.

[Online] Available from [https://www.dsac.gov.za/sites/default/files/2022-10/Handbook\\_on\\_Geographical\\_Names\\_1.pdf](https://www.dsac.gov.za/sites/default/files/2022-10/Handbook_on_Geographical_Names_1.pdf)

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

SAGNC is committed to the 2025 UNGEGN theme of *"Advancing geographical names standardization through inclusive, culturally informed and evidence-based solutions to support sustainable development"* in South Africa.

As such the SAGNC Draft Amendment Bill seeks to **1)** strengthen the role of provincial committees, **2)** clarify the role of Ministers at provincial government level in appointing provincial committees, **3)** what constitutes public consultation on proposed names, and the **4)** establishment of an independent Ministerial Appeals Tribunal which will deal with all appeals after names have been approved by the Minister and gazetted.

This is a major advancement since the promulgation of the names standardisation legislation and to safe guard the legitimacy of the re/naming process.

The First Nation (Khoi and San) are amongst indigenous groups who are consulted nationally during public consultations, of the Draft Amendment Bill.

SAGNC has resolved to strengthen relations with other government departments, state public entities and the private sector (e.g. google maps, various media outlets, etc.) whose mandate is to implement names that have been approved, for official purposes. Various provincial committees have independently entered into partnerships with academic institutions to assist with historic and archive research on proposed names.