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

National report of Zimbabwe

Submitted by Zimbabwe

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National report of Zimbabwe

1.0 Introduction

Zimbabwe is one of the few counties named after a cultural heritage place namely Great Zimbabwe National Monument World Heritage Site. It is also known for one of the seven wonders of the world, the majestic Victoria Falls/Mosi Oa Tunya, named after Queen Victoria of the United Kingdom of Great Britain. This blend of geographical names coming from both the pre-Independence and post-independence period clearly indicate the multi-cultural society that Zimbabwe is, as a nation that moves towards leaving no one and no place behind. Zimbabwe celebrates its unique cultural heritage which is based on humility and Ubuntu encompassing different ethnicities in geographical naming. In light of this, geographical naming in Zimbabwe clearly reflects this multi-faceted cultural society that celebrates both local and international heroic figures that contributed to our nation Zimbabwe.

Background

During the early years of Zimbabwe's Independence in 1980, a Cabinet Committee on Place Names was established in 1982. Its primary goal was to oversee the renaming of cities, towns, streets and other places to remove colonial vestiges and reflect the new national identity, honoring Zimbabwean and heroes and history. This committee was responsible for the initial wave of name changes including Salisbury to Harare, Fort Victoria to Masvingo and numerous streets in major cities; being guided by the **Names Alteration Act (1983)** which provided the legal basis for these changes.

Recent Development

The renaming process has continued, although not as intensely as in the early 1980s. Local authorities can recommend changes which are then submitted to a designated Cabinet Committee for Consideration.

More emphasis is on honouring national heroes, regional icons as well as reflecting Zimbabwean history and culture.

Specific Examples

The Cabinet Committee on Place Names approves the renaming of streets in cities like Harare and Bulawayo as well as government buildings in honour of liberation war heroes and other significant figures.

In light of the above mentioned developments, Zimbabwe has managed to continue moving in the right direction through the Statutory Instrument 167 of 2020 which listed the new names of streets, roads, buildings in order to reflect what the citizens can relate to.

2.0 Importance of Geographical Naming

The primary reason for geographical naming is to ensure navigation and ease of movement to an area of interest. However, geographical naming in Zimbabwe also reflects the historical significance as names echo memories that identify people with a particular place and completes the storytelling. The name of Zimbabwe, for example, means Big House of Stone, reflects the resilience of the Great Zimbabwe ruins and culture, is also a national identity.

In addition to the above, Zimbabwe is a multicultural country that is known to acknowledge various ethnicities. As per the constitution of Zimbabwe, there are sixteen (16) official languages, with the majority of citizens being fluent in Shona, Ndebele and English. However, naming of places respects the local languages in the places of their location.

3.0 Legal framework

Zimbabwe has supportive legal infrastructure that enables the standardization and regularization of geographical naming. The following complement each other and ensure smooth approach for geographical names:

- **The Names Alteration Act [Chapter 10:24]** allows changes to the names of various entities within Zimbabwe, including local authorities, institutions and places. It also covers a wide range of entities including cities, municipalities' towns and even individual roads and buildings for example the changing of Ansa Road to Mahatma Gandhi Road in Harare.
- **Provincial Councils and Administration Act [Chapter 29:11]** governs provincial administration and potentially influences geographical naming as it provides guidelines for naming geographical features.
- **Survey Act [Chapter 20:10]** which ensures consistency and accuracy in geographical naming through standardizing names; regulating surveys through overseeing surveying and mapping which includes geographical naming and empowering the Surveyor General to approve and regulate geographical names.
- **National Museums and Monuments Act [Chapter 25:11]**, is a law that governs the preservation and conservation of cultural and natural heritage in Zimbabwe which gives the mandate to NAZ to be a repository for documenting and preserving Zimbabwe's historical records, such as maps, photographs and historical documents.

4.0 The Role of the Government

Cabinet Committee on Place Names

The Committee is responsible for the following:

Reviewing Proposals: Assessing recommendations for name changes submitted by local authorities and other entities

Policy formulation: Establishing guidelines and criteria for place naming.

Consultation: engaging with relevant stakeholders such as historical societies, cultural organisations and local communities

Approval authority: Making final decisions on proposed name changes before they are gazetted

Ensuring national cohesion: considering the impact of name changes on national unity and identity

4.1 Role of National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ)

NMMZ plays an important role under Geographical names as it is responsible for the management of Cultural and Natural Heritage of this country.

Through the enabling act [**Chapter 25:11**], NMMZ has the mandate of the preservation, presentation and sustainable utilization of cultural heritage. This can only be achieved through appropriate naming of Heritage and Historical Places. NMMZ provides information and awareness of geographic and cultural names through information panels, site museums and exhibitions.

As a result, NMMZ has recorded more than 300 national monuments whose names reflect the history, culture, traditions and Zimbabwe's identity.

Most geographical features in Zimbabwe such as mountains, rivers and trees are named after cultural objects/properties, totems, animals and traditions.

4.2 Role of the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ)

The NAZ keeps records of all government documents including historical and cultural places. The role of NAZ in geographical naming is critical in documenting historical place names and their origins, providing research support through provision of archival records and assisting in preserving cultural heritage through development of a database. NAZ contributes to understanding Zimbabwe's geographical history and cultural identity.

4.3 Role of Local Government

The Local Government plays a significant role in geographical naming. City and town councils are responsible for naming streets, roads and other local geographical features; approving new names and

also changing colonial names and maintaining records of geographical names within their jurisdictions. This ensures that local geographical names reflect the community's history culture and identity.

5.0 Current Practice

Geographical naming in Zimbabwe currently involves community engagement, consultation, research and documentation, standardization and consistency and respect for cultural and historical significance. This is done through a collaborative whole of government approach that sees stakeholders in geographical naming such as government ministries, department of Surveyor General, National Museum and Monuments of Zimbabwe, Local Authorities and Traditional Leaders having meetings to agree on the naming and or renaming of geographical features. This is rigorously done to ensure that the assigned names reflect what the users can relate to. The proposal for new names will then be approved by the Cabinet Committee on Place Names. For example, there have been streets that have been renamed in Harare such as Patrice Lumumba Street (formerly 3rd Street), and Fidel Castro Road (formerly Charter Road); both these international figures are recognized for their contribution to modern day Zimbabwe.

6.0 Database for Geographical Names in Zimbabwe

The following are the current databases for geographical names:

Surveyor General's Office: maintains records of geographical names, maps and surveys

National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe: maintains a database of all national monuments and iconic cultural objects of the country.

Zimbabwe National Geospatial Agency: The agency keeps a database used by various organisations to store and manage geographical data.

These databases support:

- Mapping and surveying
- Urban planning
- Research and development
- Cultural heritage identification.

7. Challenges in Geographical naming in Zimbabwe

The following are the major challenges Zimbabwe faces in Geographical Naming:

Colonial legacy: many geographical names reflect colonial history leading to cause for renaming to reflect indigenous heritage.

Linguistic diversity: Zimbabwe diverse languages can lead to distortions in local meaning, spelling and pronunciation.

Documentation: incomplete or inaccurate records can hinder geographical naming efforts.

Community consultation: ownership of heritage sites are being contested.

These challenges are currently being countered through a whole of government approach in which intensive consultations among stakeholders are underway to harmonize in order to establish accurate geographical names for submission