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**Technical Expertise: Names collection, office
treatment, features beyond a single sovereignty
and international cooperation**

Collecting and documenting geographical names in the Empty Quarter desert in Saudi Arabia

Summary**

The Empty Quarter is located in the southeast of the Arabian Peninsula. It is the largest unbroken expanse of sandy desert in the world, one of the harshest deserts and driest places on earth, an unknown world that up until now no one has dared penetrate except the camel herders who know the paths and passages between the towering sand dunes. However, the Empty Quarter has many features of surpassing beauty. It stretches across four countries with an area of more than 650,000 km², and is some 1,200 km long and 640 km wide. It abounds with natural resources such as oil, gas, radioactive minerals and solar energy. Sand dunes in the Empty Quarter can be as high as 220 m.

Recently, interest has grown in the Empty Quarter as a unique tourist destination. However, it is not a traditional type of tourist destination. It is distinguished by towering sand dunes, varied terrain and scenic landscapes. It requires special preparation, since there are no hotels or resorts. It is no surprise that the Empty Quarter was chosen as part of the route of the rally race held in Saudi Arabia in 2025.

The General Authority for Survey and Geospatial Information has devoted great attention to geographical names. The geographical name is the most important element of geospatial information and, of course, of any map. These geographical names were last examined almost 70 years ago at an average scale of 1:100,000.

The General Authority for Survey and Geospatial Information has now finished documenting geographical names of the Empty Quarter using trained survey teams with the help of guides with knowledge of the nature of the Empty Quarter. The

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** The full report was prepared by Abdullah al Ghaihab, The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, General Authority for Survey and Geospatial Information. The report will be available under document symbol GEGN.2/2025/27/CRP.49, in the language of submission only, at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/sessions/4th_session_2025/.



documentation of geographical names includes geographical location, natural prolongation of the features and the scientific classification of features, with romanization and databases. More than 450 geographical terms have been defined in Arabic and English. A book explicating the terms can be found on the website of the General Authority for Survey and Geospatial Information. We will cover in detail the interactions between the survey teams and the guides and camel herders they met and the awe-inspiring features of the Empty Quarter they encountered. We will also delve into the standardization of the names of features that stretch from the Empty Quarter into neighbouring countries.
