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ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES**

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Activities relating to the Working Group on Publicity and Funding

Towards a Geographical Names Day *

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Towards a Geographical Names Day

Summary

To better inform government authorities, academic and research institutions and the public on the relevance of the UN's mission to standardize geographical names and to highlight, in 2017, the 50th anniversary of the First United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, it is suggested that an International, or World, Geographical Names Day be instituted. Should this project not materialize, it is suggested that the 11th Conference adopt a resolution recommending that toponymic authorities worldwide hold such a day each year in their jurisdictions.

Context of the proposal

Despite ongoing efforts for over 50 years, the UN's geographical names standardization program is still little known to the general public—and even to government authorities—and very few academic institutions offer courses on toponymy. However, for a variety of reasons, the need for reliable geographical references, and therefore for standardized names, continues to grow.

We are of the opinion that it would be appropriate to institute a yearly reminder of the mission of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) and how it benefits governments and the public. To that end, it is proposed that one day in the year be declared as dedicated to geographical names to provide UN authorities and the various toponymic authorities with the opportunity to issue that reminder.

UN International and World Days

Since its founding, the United Nations (UN) has dedicated various calendar dates to various programs and causes to promote its activities or priorities and raise interest in them. For example, September 21 is International Peace Day and September 27 is World Tourism Day. For more information on these world and international days, visit the UN's Observances webpage at <http://www.un.org/en/events/observances/index.shtml>.

We would like to point out that 2017, year of the 11th United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, will mark the 50th anniversary of these conferences. It would be a perfect opportunity to mark this anniversary by instituting an international or world, geographical names day. To do so, the project would have to be started now to take into account any possible administrative delays.

Substance of a Geographical Names Day

To give substance to a geographical names day, we suggest holding a series of activities, closely linked to the event, to draw the attention of target clienteles and inform them of the relevance of toponymic standardization and its individual and collective benefits.

The range of possible activities is wide. These could include the unveiling of a commemorative geographical name; the highlighting of a major achievement by the toponymic authority in the past year or a highly publicized safeguarding of a name imbued with cultural heritage; the presentation of a toponymy award; an avant-garde toponymy celebration event; the launch of a toponymic publication or webpage; the announcement of geographical names management training; etc.

Alternative Solution

In the event that instituting an international or world geographical names day is, for various reasons, not feasible or desirable, and in the event that should such a day is nonetheless deemed appropriate by the UNGEGN, the adopting of a resolution at the 11th Conference, that such a day be established in other countries worldwide on the initiative of national toponymic authorities, could be considered. The resolution could include a specific recommendation as to the date. Since the first Conference took place from September 4 to 22, a date within that period could be preferable.

We believe that the UNGEGN Working Group on Publicity and Funding could be assigned the project to establish an international or world geographical names day.