

THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES: ACHIEVING THE IMPOSSIBLE?

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Since its inception in the late 1940s the United Nations has recognised that the consistent use of accurate place names is an essential element of communication worldwide. The task of promoting the standardization of geographical names has been taken forward during the past three decades by the United Nations Group of Experts (UNGEGN) and its constituent working groups, divisions and participating countries. During that period the map of the world and geographical names on it have changed dramatically. In addition to the creation of new nations, there has been a growing awareness that place-names can identify culture, heritage and landscape. In a constantly changing world where global electronic communication requires a new level of consistency, how can the UNGEGN Working Group on Publicity and Funding in particular make a significant contribution to the promotion of national programmes to standardize geographical names?