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**25th Session, United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names**  
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Item 15 of the provisional agenda  
**Activities relating to the Working Group on Exonyms**

## **Guidelines for the use of exonyms**

**Submitted by the Working Group on Exonyms\***

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## Guidelines for the use of exonyms

The Working Group on Exonyms started the discussion on guidelines for the use of exonyms already at its 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting in Prague, May 17-18, 2007, and focused on this topic at its 8<sup>th</sup> meeting in Timișoara, September 9-11, 2008. This paper represents the result of this discussion process. While, however, the proposed draft resolution may be regarded as the smallest common denominator of all opinions represented in the WG, the Appendix is based on a wide consensus in the WG, but not approved by all its members. It is added here to provide for some additional guidance, but is not intended to be part of a resolution.

### *Draft resolution*

The Conference,

Recalling the various resolutions with reference to exonyms adopted by the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names (II/28, II/29, II/31, II/38, III/18, III/19, IV/20, V/13, VIII/4);

Further recalling the general intention of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names to reduce the use of exonyms in international communications;

Recognizing that the customary option for the portrayal of geographical names in international communications will involve use of the standardized endonym;

Acknowledging however that exonyms exist and that an exonym is a function of language<sup>1</sup>;

Further acknowledging that there exist both donor languages (relevant to the endonym of a particular feature) and receiver languages (relevant to the publication or audience for which that feature is to be identified);

Recommends that, where donor and receiver languages differ, an exonym be considered suitable for use in publications as the customary option for the names of features in the following limited circumstances:

- for the names of countries (unless the specific purpose of the publication is to show endonyms)
- for the names of features of shared or divided sovereignty (especially in publications where space is limited)
- for the names of exclusively historical features without any corresponding current endonym;

Further recommends that, if considered useful for communication, an exonym may additionally be used in publications for the names of selected features within a single sovereignty (where donor and receiver languages differ), provided that the exonym is deployed in the following manner:

- it should be apolitical, and sensitively chosen
- in running text the corresponding endonym for the feature should be noted at suitable junctures.

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<sup>1</sup> See the definition of exonym in the *Glossary of Terms for the Standardization of Geographical Names: Addendum* (UN document ST/ESA/STAT/SER.M/85/Add.1, 07-60262, dated 16 November 2007).

## *Appendix*

For features within a single sovereignty an exonym may thus be taken into consideration

- rather in communicative situations, where the audience is addressed in an unofficial or informal way than in communicative situations, where the audience is addressed in an official or formal way;
- rather in a historical context than in a context referring to the present situation;
- rather with the spoken and written word than with technical and scientific means of communication;
- rather with means of communication used predominantly outside the area of the donor language than with means of communication used predominantly in the area of the donor language;
- rather with names in less frequent secondary, educational or trade languages with speakers of the receiver language than with names in frequent secondary, educational or trade languages;
- rather with names composed of a specific and a semantically transparent generic term than with names consisting of a single word;
- rather with names of features currently important or for historical reasons well known to the community of the receiver language than with names of (in history or present) less important features;
- rather with names of features of the nature sphere than with names of features in the cultural sphere.