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East Central and South-East Europe Division (ECSEED)

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**Safeguarding of geographical names as part of the intangible cultural
heritage**

Submitted by Cyprus*

* Prepared by Mr. Prodromos Vasileiou, the President of the Cyprus Permanent Committee for the Standardization of Geographical Names, Cyprus.

**CYPRUS PERMANENT COMMITTEE
FOR THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES**

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE
LEFKOSIA - CYPRUS**

Safeguarding of geographical names as part of the intangible cultural heritage

As you all know the United Nations in recognizing the great meaning and value of Geographical Names all over the world and the difficulty caused in the work to all the users of them, undertook in 1961 international efforts for the standardization of geographical names. Soon after the same efforts were undertaken for the protection of the geographical names as part of the cultural heritage. And this is apparent from the first Resolutions taken during the United Nations Conferences for the Standardization of Geographical Names.

As it is always pointed out at the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names, geographical names of all countries are significant not only for contemporary use but also for History itself. A Greek scholar and other famous scholars and researchers on the topic of geographical names said, that these are voices of our ancestors preserved in the form of carvings on the ground. These voices help us to communicate with our past. During human history there have been cases of peoples, who moved, integrated and were lost as linguistic groups. But even in that case, their language remained as a background of the place names they used. Through their place names we learn about their existence, their space and their culture. The Celts present such an example in Europe.

This item, the Geographical Names as Part of the Cultural Heritage, was evolved as one of the major topics during the 9th United Nations Conference on the Standardization of geographical names in August 2007. Many countries supported that the geographical names are part of the cultural heritage of each country and as such they must be protected. Mrs. Helene-Marie Gosselin, Unesco Representative to the United Nations and director of the Unesco New York Bureau, in her speech, to the above 9th Conference, referred to the issue of safeguarding the geographical names as part of the Intangible Cultural

Heritage. She indicated that the geographical names constitute an important element of linguistic heritage and traditions.

The diachronic toponymic tradition must be preserved alive from antiquity until modern times. Today both United Nations and UNESCO enact to the protection of geographical names as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of peoples. In addition to that, peoples have the obligation and the moral duty to preserve geographical names in order to pass them as a legacy to the coming generations.

For the safeguarding of geographical names as part of the cultural heritage a Geo Names 2008 Symposium was organized by UNGEGN Dutch and German Speaking Division and other Austrian Academies of Sciences Institutes, which took place in Vienna on 19-21 May 2008, where many papers have been presented supporting the safeguarding of the geographical names as part of the intangible heritage.

The Asia South-West Division (other than Arabic) between the Resolutions adopted during the 7th and 8th Regional Meetings in 2003 and 2008 include the prevention of any changes of the historical and traditional names and the safeguarding of geographical names as part of the intangible cultural heritage.

We may also recall previous U.N. Conferences Resolutions on the Standardization of Geographical Names which promote a greater understanding among the wider public of the significance of inherited geographical names with respect to local, regional and national heritage and identity.

This short presentation illustrates the importance of geographical names and must be regarded as a significant part of the cultural heritage of every country and must be protected against any premeditated or violent changes.

Taking into account the great meaning of all the above and not only, I may suggest to this 19th Session to adopt a Resolution and promote it to the coming 25th UNGEGN Session for the safeguarding of geographical names as part of the intangible cultural heritage and discouraging of changing of geographical names, which could lead to the loss of cultural and historical heritage and also

to endorse and reaffirm previous resolutions concerned on the topic III/16, VI/9, VIII/9, IX/4, etc.

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