United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names
2021 session
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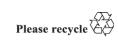Item 7 of the provisional agenda**
Social and economic benefits, supporting sustainable development, measures taken and proposed for the implementation of resolutions and evaluation of the work of the Group of Experts

The impact of using a geographical names database in Saudi Arabia in the response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic

Summary***

The novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has presented a major threat to the world's societies. Saudi Arabia has gone through the most critical phase of the pandemic. The Ministry of Health used interactive maps that are based on the geographical names database in order to show the administrative areas, provinces, villages and cities where the threat of COVID-19 spreading was the greatest. The geographical names in question were clearly visible on those maps. Those digital maps have indirectly helped to familiarize the public with certain uncommon or obscure geographical names and to establish the correct location of those geographical name in the minds of people. In addition, video and audio news bulletins have helped the public learn the correct pronunciation of certain geographical names (e.g., Sabt al-Alaya, Samitah, Qilwah, Rafa'i' al-Jamsh, Maddah, Mulayjah, Wadi bin Hashbal, Hajrah, Thurayban and Ruwaydat al-Ard). The National Committee for Geographical Names of Saudi Arabia is striving to promote the writing of geographical names using Latin letters in Saudi Arabia. However, it continues to be stymied by the failure of Saudi Arabian health institutions to grasp the need to write geographical names in Latin letters, in particular when presenting the geographical names of administrative areas, provinces, cities and neighbourhoods in a language other than Arabic.

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