

Agenda Item 5 (d): National and international meetings and conferences

Statement delivered by H. E. Mr. Yasuhisa KAWAMURA,
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary,
Deputy Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations,
Head of Delegation of Japan to the First United Nations Group of Experts
on Geographical Names,
with regard to the working paper GEGN.2/2019/CRP.118

[1st intervention]

Thank you Mr. Chair,

Since we are taking a floor for the first time, let me congratulate your re-appointment as the Chair and commend your contribution to the UNGEGN as the Chair for six years.

As the Chair has correctly reminded us in the beginning, the UNGEGN is the venue for the technical discussion and not for the political issue, thus we should avoid the latter. Japan fully agrees with the Chair and respects this technical and academic nature of the UNGEGN, and supports its aim to promote discussion on the standardization of geographical names through technical contributions such as the provision of geographical name information using vector tile data and voice-reading map. We have absolutely no intention to politicize its discussions. We also fully recognize that the UNGEGN does not have the mandate to discuss nor to make any decision or judgment on the use of individual and specific geographical names.

Having said that, concerning the paper GEGN.2/2019/CRP.118 submitted by the Republic of Korea, we are obliged to point out, just briefly, that the paper includes some unacceptable elements which do not reflect the facts at all.

First, “Sea of Japan” is the only internationally established name for the sea area bordered mainly by Japan, Russia and the eastern coast of the Korean Peninsula. From the viewpoint of toponymy, it should be noted that “Sea of Japan”, or “*Mer du Japon*”, has, since the 17th century, been used as the precedent toponym, pre-dating any internationally established name, by the United States, the United Kingdom, France, China and Russia, and it became the internationally established name in the early 19th century. Furthermore, the

United Nations, as well as other international organizations, have consistently used the name “Sea of Japan”.

Secondly, some expressions used in the paper, such as “the naming disputes”, “the naming issue between Korea and Japan” and “dual naming”, are incompatible with the fact that “Sea of Japan” is the only name which is internationally established for this sea area, and demonstrate a political intention to go against the on-going standardization of geographical names, which is the main purpose of the UNGEGN. Allowing the Republic of Korea to continue to claim the dual naming of an internationally established name and a domestically used name in international fora could inspire other countries to claim another dual naming, while factually and academically unfounded claims, thereby multiplying potential dispute on geographical names and slowing down the standardization.

Finally, please let us point out that the international seminar that the Republic of Korea referred to in its paper is of a political nature related to the name of this particular sea area and it is not appropriate to spread propaganda through the seminar in the framework of the UNGEGN. According to the official website of the seminar, we found that almost two-thirds of discussion papers presented by speakers at the seminar in 2017 were related to the Sea of Japan, and many of them were political arguments. It is extremely regrettable that the Republic of Korea has organized a seminar to serve an inappropriate unilateral political propaganda campaign. Presenting material from such a politically motivated seminar at the UNGEGN totally goes against the technical nature of this body.

Japan absolutely cannot accept the incorrect expressions made by the Republic of Korea, and so would like to request the Republic of Korea not to submit any such a paper about the seminar in future sessions of the UNGEGN.

Thank you very much.

[2nd intervention]

Thank you Mr. Chair,

Just briefly to respond to the points raised by the distinguished delegate from the Republic of Korea on the issue of the resolutions, I would like to point that the UNCSGN resolution III/20 explicitly limits its scope to land features – not sea areas, land features – that are under the sovereignty of more than one country or are divided among two or more countries.

I also need to point out the IHO Technical Resolution A.4.2.6, this resolution is for geographical features, such as bays, straits, channels or archipelagos, but not for oceans and seas, including the Japan Sea. We understand this has been the practice of IHO.

And another issue, as the IHO Technical Resolution A.4.2.6 applies to geographical features such as bays, channels or archipelagos as I said, and on the other hand the resolution does not apply to oceans and seas, including the Japan Sea, and that's our understanding, and our understanding is that this has been the practice of IHO, therefore this resolution does not apply to a concurrent of "Japan Sea" or "East Sea".

Thank you very much.