

**Ninth United Nations Conference on the
Standardization of Geographical Names**
New York, 21 - 30 August 2007
Item 15(b) of the provisional agenda*
**Features beyond a single sovereignty:
Features common to two or more nations**

**Japan's position on the name "Sea of Japan" in relation to papers
prepared for 15 (b) of the agenda**

Submitted by Japan **

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As Japan has stated at the previous sessions, the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN) is not an appropriate forum to discuss the naming of individual geographical features such as "Sea of Japan." There is a common understanding among Member States that this Conference does not have a mandate to decide the name of any particular geographical feature. As for geographical features beyond the sovereignty of any nation, including the "Pacific Ocean," the "Indian Ocean" or the "Sea of Japan," even discussing the naming of such features should be out of the scope of the Conference.

It is, therefore, regrettable that a few members have persistently tried to challenge the validity of the name "Sea of Japan" at the previous sessions, resulting in an undue politicization of the Conference and damage to its reputation as an academic and technical forum. It is also regrettable that a few working papers prepared for 15 (b) of the agenda on this 9th session of the UNCSGN, ignoring the collective will of Member States, refer to the name "Sea of Japan" as if it were an issue to be discussed at the UNCSGN. Japan is firmly committed to making every effort to preserve the integrity of the UNCSGN by opposing any attempt to interject irrelevant and politically motivated issues into the UNCSGN.

Having said that, Japan is pleased to report to the UNCSGN that it has been holding bilateral talks in good faith with the Republic of Korea (ROK) once every year since the 8th session of the UNCSGN in 2002. Japan is committed to continuing these efforts. This year, the first round of bilateral talks was held in February. In addition, Japan has already agreed to hold another round of talks with the ROK and hopes that a date for these talks will be set soon.

Japan regrets that there has been no progress in the talks with the ROK, because the ROK has so far shown no flexibility and simply repeats its unfounded allegations. For example, the ROK insists that the name "Sea of Japan" was established as a result of Japan's rule over the Korean Peninsula in early 20th century. This argument is totally

unjustified in light of the historical fact that the name “Sea of Japan” has been established in late 18th century or early 19th century, well before the aforementioned rule. The ROK has also based its claim on Resolution III/20 of UNCSTGN and IHO Technical Resolution A.4.2.6. However, these resolutions are only applicable to sea areas “under the sovereignty,” which means those resolutions do not apply to the high seas (including exclusive economic zones in this context) such as the “Sea of Japan.” Despite the ROK’s lack of flexibility, Japan is ready to engage in future talks with the ROK.

The working papers submitted under agenda item 15(b) include incorrect and inappropriate statements. Therefore, Japan finds it necessary to reiterate its basic position on the name “Sea of Japan”:^(Note)

1. The name “Sea of Japan” is the only name for the sea area concerned that has been established both historically and internationally, and it has been used not only in Japan, but all over the world, for a long time. From the results of the studies of ancient maps, it is clear that the name “Sea of Japan” became established in Europe and the United States starting in the beginning of the 19th century, a time when Japan was still under a policy of isolation and therefore unable to exert any international influence. In addition, the most recent survey conducted in late 2005 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of textbooks, school atlases and commercially available maps in 67 countries, consisting of ASEAN and IHO members and G8 nations, shows that the name “Sea of Japan” continues to be used internationally as the standard name (In 93.7% of textbooks, 92.1% of school atlases and 81.9% of commercial maps, the single name “Sea of Japan” was used). This proves the historical validity of the name “Sea of Japan.” Japan is fully aware that “East Sea” is currently used domestically in the ROK, and Japan has never challenged this practice. However, challenging the internationally established name “Sea of Japan” with the domestically used name “East Sea” based on groundless assertions is totally a different thing. Such an attempt would be unacceptable not only to Japan but also to the international community as a whole because it would set an undesirable precedent.

(Note) For detailed information, *see* <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/maritime/japan/index.html>

2. The name “Sea of Japan” has been authorized by the United Nations itself, which is the most comprehensive and neutral international organization with the participation of 192 member states and the most proper forum to represent the collective will of the international community. In fact, in response to the enquiry of the Government of Japan, the United Nations Secretariat officially replied on 10 March 2004 that “Sea of Japan” is the standard geographical term and as such is to be used in official documents of the UN. In addition to the United Nations, almost all of the main international organizations also use the name “Sea of Japan.” Furthermore, the vast majority of maps have solely used “Sea of Japan” at least since the 19th century.

3. In addition, “Sea of Japan” is recognized as the only established name by the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO). The IHO has consistently used the name “Sea of Japan” in its publication S-23 “Limits of Oceans and Seas.” This is further evidence that “Sea of Japan” is the only established name for the sea area in question. Japan is aware that, at the 17th International Hydrographic Conference, then President Dr. Williams made suggestions. However, these suggestions cannot change the status of “Sea of Japan” as the only established name. As a matter of fact, Dr. Williams stated clearly during the Conference in the presence of the ROK and the DPRK that the single name status of “Sea of Japan” would not change. He later confirmed this in an email to the Japanese delegation. It is regrettable that the revision of S-23 has been delayed due to certain members’ attempts to politicize the IHO, and that the progress in the international hydrographic field has been severely hampered. However, Japan has continued to act constructively and recently submitted a compromise proposal aimed at preventing further delay. Japan expects that the proposal will be circulated by the IHO in due course.