

THE UNITED NATIONS GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION WORKING GROUP (UNGIWG)

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Background

The establishment of the United Nations Geographic Information Working Group (UNGIWG) was the culmination of several years of efforts to bring together professionals in the fields of cartography and geographic information science within the United Nations system to address common issues affecting the work of the Organization in these fields. A proposal was submitted to the Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-agency Affairs to formalize this group in the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) framework. At its 16th session, the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ) of the ACC considered and strongly endorsed this initiative and invited the Working Group to bring to its attention any matter requiring its support.

The ACC has recently re-organized into the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). UNGIWG is a subsidiary body to the CEB High Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP).

The UNGIWG receives support of many United Nations departments, specialized agencies, programmes and organs, as well as endorsements and pledges of support from various governmental and non-governmental organizations, research institutions and industry. This high level of interest from within and outside the system reflects the importance of this effort and the need for the United Nations to take a leadership role in this area.

Mandate

Recalling and drawing inspiration from the Economic and Social Council resolution 131 (VI) of 19 February 1948, entitled “Coordination of cartographic services of specialized agencies and international organizations”, and recognizing the increasing complexity of the operational requirements and rapid technological advances that have occurred since then, the UNGIWG was established in March 2000 under the auspices of the then CCPOQ of the ACC to facilitate inter-agency co-operation and co-ordination on specific issues in the fields of cartography and geographic information science.

Objectives

The overarching objective of the UNGIWG is to promote the use of geographic information within the United Nations System and Member States for better decision-making. The UNGIWG shall aim at attaining the following:

To identify and implement protocols for sharing, maintaining and assuring the quality of geographic information within the United Nations System for efficient and cost effective use of such information with close co-operation with Member States, non-governmental organizations, research institutions and industry;

To develop and maintain a common geographic database as a crucial capacity-building effort to enhance normative, programme and operational capabilities and efficiencies within the United Nations system.

Membership

In line with the objectives set out above, members of the UNGIWG shall consist of focal points and professionals working or interested in the fields of cartography and geographic information science within the United Nations System. Each Department, Specialized Agency, Programme and Organ of the United Nations System that wishes to participate in UNGIWG shall designate a focal point as the voting members of the UNGIWG.

Participation in UNGIWG is solely on a “best-effort” basis, including eventual in-kind or other contributions by members. UNGIWG does not control any budgets and cannot therefore provide any type of funding to the members.

Modus Operandi

The UNGIWG shall function in a task-driven, goal-oriented and flexible manner as a network of professionals working or interested in the fields of cartography and geographic information science. Modern telecommunication technologies shall be used as a major means to facilitate this networking and interaction.

The Chair of the UNGIWG shall be the focal point of the organization elected by the voting members of the UNGIWG every two years. The voting members of the UNGIWG may also elect two (or more) organizations to co-chair the Group, in which case the focal points from those elected organizations will act as Co-Chairs. The chairmanship is rotated every two years within the UNGIWG membership. No member organization(s) should be elected as Chair or Co-Chairs for two consecutive terms.

The Chair, or Co-Chairs (hereafter referred to as the Chair) may appoint a Deputy Chair if desired. The Chair may call a meeting of focal points when necessary.

The Cartographic Section of the United Nations Headquarters shall serve as the Secretariat of the UNGIWG.

The UNGIWG shall work through three distinct processes:

- Plenary meetings, chaired by the Chair and consisting of all members of the UNGIWG;
- Time-bound ad-hoc Task Groups, set up by the UNGIWG and consisting of UNGIWG members and invited organizations outside the United Nations. These Task Groups, voluntary in nature, shall cease to exist after completion of their tasks.

- Some areas of work are so significant and central to the objectives of the UNGIWG that they require the establishment of longer-term Special Interest Groups. These Special Interest Groups (hereafter referred to as SIG's) will also be voluntary in nature and may arise out of Task Groups or plenary meetings. SIG's should prepare reports on their activities to each Plenary. Inactivity or lack of reporting can lead to the disbanding of such SIG's at a plenary meeting.

The UNGIWG plenary meetings shall be held once a year at the invitation of the Chair and after appropriate consultations and a vote on the location, in case several prospective hosts are identified. They shall in particular:

- Review the progress of Task Groups and Special Interest Groups;
- Establish and revise, if necessary, the short-term goals and long-term vision of the UNGIWG;
- Identify the specific tasks to be undertaken to achieve those goals and vision;
- Establish an ad-hoc Task Group for each specific task identified, decide on the mandate and time frame of each Task Group, and appoint task managers of the Task Group;
- Revise, if deemed necessary, the terms of reference;

In cases where a task is of an urgent nature and demands prompt action, the Chair shall immediately inform the members of the necessity to form an ad-hoc Task Group and, as appropriate, invite other members to participate in such a Task Group. While all UNGIWG members have the right to accept or to decline participation in any given Task Group, any such group should benefit as much as possible from the participation of those members that are most concerned with the specific task.

Each ad-hoc Task Group shall be responsible to fulfil the given mandate within the set time frame. In the event a Task Group is not able to meet the deadline, it shall submit a proposal to the Chair at least six weeks before expiration of the deadline on how and when to accomplish the task. The UNGIWG will decide on the proposal.

Participation of Non-Members

Representatives of Member States, relevant sectors of the civil society and industry with potential and specific expertise related to issues being deliberated by the UNGIWG may participate in plenary meetings of the UNGIWG by invitation of the Chair of the UNGIWG. They may also participate in the work of an ad hoc Task Group if required by the specific task under discussion, and if so decided by the Task Group. Accordingly, the task managers of the ad hoc Task Group will invite the respective additional participants.

UNGIWG may also designate external organizations deemed necessary for the achievement of the objectives of the Working Group as Liaison Organizations. Representatives of Liaison Organizations may attend UNGIWG meetings and state their opinions.

Reporting

The Chair, with the assistance of the Secretariat, shall prepare a report of each plenary meeting and a half-year update on UNGIWG activities, to be distributed to all members of the UNGIWG and submitted to the UN Chief Executives Board (CEB).

The Chair, upon request by the CEB, shall attend CEB meetings and report on the activities of UNGIWG.

The task managers of each ad-hoc Task Group shall communicate regularly with the Chair and submit results of their work to the Chair, who shall then transmit the results to all members of the UNGIWG.
