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Advisory Group on the United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations

Report of the Advisory Group on the United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations at its 2023 meeting

Submitted by the secretariat

Summary

The United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations (UN/LOCODE) Advisory Group held its 2023 meeting on 11 and 12 May 2023. The secretariat prepared a conference report detailing activities undertaken by the group and the decisions made at the meeting. The participants reviewed and agreed to this report.

The report provides a summary of the major activities conducted by the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group and the developments and the decisions related to UN/LOCODE, such as the intervention of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) in the 47th session of the Facilitation Committee on the International Maritime Organization (IMO) Compendium on Facilitation and Electronic Business (FAL 47); the use of UN/LOCODE by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to support sustainable fisheries, such as for the Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA) and the Global Record; the potential fast-tracking of UN/LOCODE as an ISO standard; the Geofence Project; the recommendations on the UN/LOCODE maintenance policies; and the creation of a task force to further study the issues raised at the meeting.

Document ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2023/22 is submitted to the twenty-ninth session of the UN/CEFACT Plenary for endorsement.

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I. Introduction and attendance

1. The United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations (UN/LOCODE) Advisory Group held its 2023 meeting on 11 and 12 May 2023 in Geneva. The meeting was attended by 22 delegates and experts representing national government agencies, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. The following United Nations Member States were represented: Brazil, China, Japan and Denmark. The following United Nations bodies and organizations participated in the meeting: the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Universal Postal Union (UPU). Representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector participated: the Bureau International des Containers (BIC), the International Organization of Standardization (ISO), the Ship Message Design Group (SMDG), the Digital Container Shipping Association (DCSA), the Asia Pacific Council for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (AFACT), Hapag-Lloyd, EUROGATE, the Top Tier Group, K-Consulting, the Josai International University (JIU), GEFEG, the Korea Internet & Security Agency (KISA), CIF Consulting, the China National Institute of Standardization (CNIS) and the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology (CAICT).

II. Opening remarks

2. The Director of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) opened the meeting by welcoming the representatives of the group. She highlighted the importance of UN/LOCODE for international trade, its economic impact and its relevance to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). She also emphasized the necessity of extending the Advisory Group's mandate to maintain continuity and to ensure that the cyber security concerns flagged for the current UN/LOCODE system are addressed. Additionally, as Division Director, she expressed her commitment to continue supporting Member States with the following:

- Documenting and promoting the significance of UN/LOCODE;

- Ensuring that the secretariat efficiently carry out the UN/LOCODE work using emerging technologies, inspired by the United Nations Secretary-General's Data Strategy; and

- Mobilizing resources, not only to keep UN/LOCODE going, but also to make it modern with a top-notch, user-friendly interface.

3. The Chair of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group echoed the remarks of the Director and responded by flagging two challenges concerning UN/LOCODE:

- Since the definition of location has been changed from point to area in the revised Recommendation No. 16, the coexistence of UN/LOCODEs assigned to both point and area locations might need to be cleaned up.

- In addition to the three child codes currently registered in the ECE repository from BIC, SMDG and IMO, new child codes might need to be recognized to identify sublocations.

4. She also stressed that the Advisory Group should request that the UN/CEFACT Plenary extend the Advisory Group's mandate for another two-year term, with a new programme of work (2024-2025) to be approved at the next Plenary session.

III. Procedural

5. The agenda of the meeting was approved. (Decision 23-1)

IV. Report from the secretariat

6.   The Secretary of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group reported on the activities since the 2022 meeting of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group as follows:

- Timely publication of UN/LOCODE releases 2021-1 and 2021-2;

- Enhancement of the UN/LOCODE Focal Point Network through new nominations from Chile and Egypt, along with the renomination from Sweden;

- Collaboration with FAO on the Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA) and the Global Record;

- Updates on the IMO Compendium on Facilitation and Electronic Business (FAL 47) highlighting the ECE request to remove a recommendation from the Guidelines for Harmonized Communication and Electronic Exchange of Operational Data for Port Calls that only the GS1 Global Location Number (GLN) be used for vessel-berth compatibility checks;

- Updates on the ISO 3166 Maintenance Agency, particularly the review by their task force of the administration languages used in ISO 3166 and the forthcoming proposal for a consistent approach;

- Progress on the UN/CEFACT project on the JSON-LD Web Vocabulary;

- Ongoing UN/LOCODE maintenance activities involving the validation of data maintenance requests (DMRs) by the UN/LOCODE Maintenance Team via regular virtual maintenance meetings;

- Servicing two ad-hoc meetings on the UN/LOCODE maintenance policy to develop draft recommendations for the Advisory Group's approval;

- Efforts to address issues related to the current UN/LOCODE system and to explore potential long-term solutions; and

- Presentation of a draft programme of work for the period of 2024 to 2025 for approval and subsequent submission to the next UN/CEFACT Plenary.

V. Overview of new developments and follow-up

7.   On behalf of the representative of IMO, the Chair provided an update on the 47th session of the Facilitation Committee on the IMO Compendium on Facilitation and Electronic Business (FAL 47), covering facilitation instruments, maritime autonomous surface ships (MASS) and electronic business. It was highlighted that by 1 January 2024, a maritime single window for data exchange will become mandatory in ports around the world. All IMO member States need to establish, maintain and utilize maritime single windows for the electronic exchange of information. In this context, the use of UN/LOCODE will be expanded in the maritime sector.

8.   Concerning a recommendation in the Guidelines for Harmonized Communication and Electronic Exchange of Operational Data for Port Calls to only use the GS1 Global Location Number (GLN) for vessel-berth compatibility checks, the secretariat intervened at FAL 47 to raise concerns and to request that this recommendation be removed or reworded. With the coordination of the IMO secretariat and the support of the chair and the vice-chair of the Advisory Group and other experts, the recommendation was removed from the final version of the guidelines.

9.   Delegates and participants expressed their appreciation for the collaborative approach and the team spirit showcased in resolving the matter concerning the GS1 GLN and encouraged the ECE secretariat to maintain coordination with the IMO secretariat through the UN/LOCODE Focal Point for IMO to address all matters related to UN/LOCODE in the maritime industry. (Decision 23-2)

10.   The Domain Coordinator of UN/CEFACT introduced the Geofence Project initiated by BIC. They explained that BIC and SMDG have collaborated to share data in their

respective databases using application programming interfaces (APIs) and have established a geofence review panel, drawing inspiration from the UN/LOCODE maintenance mechanism. The coordinator highlighted that the forthcoming publication would offer valuable insights into the new UN/CEFACT project on geofencing facilities.

11. Delegates and participants requested that the ECE secretariat engage the UN/LOCODE business community in the new UN/CEFACT project on geofencing facilities and report on its development at the 2024 meeting of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group. (Decision 23-3)

12. The representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) briefed attendees on the progress of sustainable fisheries. The Global Record Informal Open-Ended Technical and Advisory Working Group (GRWG) made a recommendation at its sixth meeting on 12 December 2022 regarding UN/LOCODE as an identifier for the port of registry of fishing vessels uploaded on the Global Record. GRWG welcomed the ECE secretariat providing a process whereby ports not currently registered with a UN/LOCODE could be registered within six months of asking, and that new types or categories of ports could be added to the UN/LOCODE directory in the future if deemed necessary. GRWG also expressed concern that six months can be too long in some cases. The Technical Working Group on Information Exchange (TWG-IE) made a recommendation at its third meeting on 13-14 December 2022 concerning the use of UN/LOCODE for identifying designated ports (DPs) under the Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA). TWG-IE highlighted the importance of ensuring that all designated ports under PSMA be associated with a UN/LOCODE when possible. This recommendation was submitted to the Fourth Meeting of the Parties to the PSMA (MOP4) held on 8-12 May 2023 in Bali, Indonesia.

13. Delegates and participants requested that the ECE secretariat establish a task force to create a solution to identify small fishery ports to meet the FAO demand, as recommended by GRWG. (Decision 23-4)

14. Delegates and participants urged the ECE secretariat to explore various resources to re-engineer the UN/LOCODE system to allow for real-time data exchange using APIs to avoid a six-month wait for UN/LOCODE releases. (Decision 23-5)

15. Delegates and participants encouraged the ECE secretariat to conduct an official mapping of the list of designated ports with corresponding UN/LOCODE, to be coordinated with the FAO secretariat and with the support of the UN/LOCODE national focal points (NFPs). (Decision 23-6)

16. Delegates and participants tasked the ECE secretariat with preparing a guide on this mapping practice to facilitate the work done by the NFPs. (Decision 23-7)

17. The Chair of the ISO Technical Committee 154 (ISO/TC 154) presented an overview of the fast-track procedure to adopt a UN/CEFACT standard as an ISO standard. An example of this is a project under ISO/TC 154 to fast-track the UN/CEFACT Buy-Ship-Pay Reference Data Model as ISO 20197.

18. Delegates and participants requested that the ECE secretariat establish a task force to study the feasibility of fast-tracking UN/LOCODE as an ISO standard and report on its findings at the 2024 meeting of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group. (Decision 23-8)

19. On behalf of the secretariat, the Domain Coordinator of UN/CEFACT presented the UN/CEFACT project on the JSON-LD Web Vocabulary and its potential benefits for UN/LOCODE. This new project aims to deliver the UN/CEFACT supply chain vocabulary published in JSON-LD, both human-readable and machine-readable, to support the international community in the development of interoperable APIs, internet of things (IoT) streams, and verifiable credentials. Additionally, it might serve as another channel to receive data maintenance requests.

20. Delegates and participants requested that the ECE secretariat follow up on the project to collect feedback on UN/LOCODE published in JSON-LD from the UN/LOCODE business community and report on it at the 2024 meeting of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group. (Decision 23-9)

VI. UN/LOCODE maintenance

21.   The Convener of the UN/LOCODE Maintenance Team reported on the UN/LOCODE data maintenance requests validation during the recent maintenance cycles. She provided an overview of the team's work, difficulties and challenges. She also pointed out that the team had received queries about the possible intention of ECE to stop using UN/LOCODE. These queries were triggered by the misinterpretation of the warning flag for the cyber security issues on the current UN/LOCODE system and was clarified by the secretariat several times.

22.   Delegates and participants expressed their gratitude to the following parties:

- The secretariat for their dedicated support and coordination;

- The Convenor of the UN/LOCODE Maintenance Team for her excellent work;

- UN/LOCODE focal points and experts who have contributed to the DMR validation; and

- DMR submitters who were present at the maintenance meetings to facilitate the DMR validation by justifying their requests.

23.   The Secretary of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group reported on the last two ad-hoc meetings on the UN/LOCODE maintenance policy, held on 29 June 2022 in hybrid mode and on 13 April 2023 virtually. As the outcomes of the meetings, the recommendations were presented for the Advisory Group's approval.

24.   Delegates and participants agreed to adopt the following maintenance policies and best practices and encouraged the UN/LOCODE Maintenance Team to validate DMRs in line with them (Decision 23-10):

- The centre of a requested area should be located as representative geocoordinates;

- Function "B" will not be reintroduced to Recommendation 16 and a location on the border will be specified in the way that "Border" is indicated in the column "Remarks";

- Transport cost will (preferably) not to be introduced as a new criterion to assign a new UN/LOCODE but will be addressed case by case, based on business practices;

- Special attention should be given to distinguishing special economic zones from exclusive economic zones, as well as to understanding the difference between Function "A" and Function "6";

- Sublocations within an area location, such as an airport or a port, may be assigned a separate UN/LOCODE if duly justified by the national focal point; and

- In cases of duplications, only one entry will remain for the location. It will be cleaned up through data maintenance requests with the criteria to retain as follows: (i) created/modified earlier; (ii) the last three characters with more letters; (iii) status starts with "A". NFPs are encouraged to manage the duplications.

25.   Delegates and participants took note of the methodology outlined below for addressing maintenance policy issues (Decision 23-11):

- The secretariat drafts a working document that encompasses all the issues raised recently;

- A volunteer, supported by expert volunteers, leads a discussion on each issue to propose potential solutions;

- The ad-hoc meeting participants deliberate upon the working document and reach an agreement on recommendations; and

- The recommendations resulting from the ad-hoc meeting are submitted for approval at the next annual meeting of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group.

26.   Delegates and participants also expressed their appreciation to the experts who contributed to the working document for the last ad-hoc meeting.

27. The representative of the UN/LOCODE NFP for Japan raised concerns about inconsistencies in the code list for Japan. They illustrated issues related to assigning UN/LOCODEs to sublocations and multiple UN/LOCODEs to one location.

28. Delegates and participants took note of the importance of reviews by the NFPs to improve the UN/LOCODE data quality and welcomed initiatives and efforts by NFPs to review the code lists for their countries. (Decision 23-12)

29. The representative of the UN/LOCODE NFP for China indicated that the practice in China is that a customs office in a requested location is regarded as a criterion to assign a new UN/LOCODE. They pointed out that UN/LOCODEs assigned to locations (areas) coexist with legacy UN/LOCODEs assigned to sublocations (points). In this context, an official child code might be a potential solution to identify sublocations.

30. Delegates and participants encouraged the NFPs to clarify the criteria and the level of the smallest administrative unit in the country that can be assigned a UN/LOCODE and requested that the ECE secretariat include them in the guidelines on UN/LOCODE maintenance published on the ECE website. (Decision 23-13)

31. Delegates and participants requested that the ECE secretariat follow up with future discussions on the proposed official child code and report at the 2024 meeting of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group. (Decision 23-14)

32. Delegates and participants requested that the ECE secretariat liaise with the IMO secretariat to better understand the following two points and report their findings at the 2024 meeting of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group (Decision 23-15):

• The international practice to identify a floating production storage and offloading (FPSO) unit/vessel; and

• Whether it is enough to identify a location in international waters with an international safety management (ISM) code.

33. The representative of Hapag-Lloyd pointed out that if UN/LOCODE were an official tag recognized on OpenStreetMap, the geofence would be searchable with UN/LOCODE.

34. The Chair of ISO/TC154 delivered a presentation comparing different location codes from ISO, the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). In his opinion there is currently no ISO standard to serve as a physical positioning location code being used in global supply chains like UN/LOCODE.

35. Considering the limited resources available to the ECE secretariat, delegates and participants urged the secretariat to prioritize the assignments of the task forces mentioned above by setting up a single task force, led by the vice-chair with the support of the secretariat, to accomplish the various tasks in an optimal order. Delegates and participants tasked the ECE secretariat with preparing terms of reference (ToR) for this task force. (Decision 23-16)

VII. Programme of work for 2024-2025

36. The secretariat presented a draft programme of work (PoW) for the period (2024-2025) to the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group for approval.

37. Delegates and participants requested that the Chair present it to the next UN/CEFACT Plenary for decision to extend the mandate of the Advisory Group by another term (2024-2025). (Decision 23-17)

VIII. Future work and other business

38. Delegates and participants discussed a possible date and place to hold the next annual meeting.

39. Delegates and participants expressed their desire not to organize the annual meetings in conjunction with the UN/CEFACT Forum in the future and welcomed volunteer(s) to host the next meeting in hybrid mode. (Decision 23-18)

IX. Adoption of decisions and the report

40.   Delegates and participants agreed to decisions 1 to 18 and the draft report. (Decision 23-19)

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