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Equitable Cartography: The UN Resolution on a New World Map

On 4 September 2026, 164 countries voted in favour of a United Nations draft resolution entitled “Correcting the Map”. The aim of this resolution was to restore balance in global cartographic representation and to promote the fair representation of world regions, with a particular focus on Africa. The objective was to create a map that would more accurately reflect the actual size of countries and continents. The United States voted against the draft, while Estonia, Georgia, Lithuania, Moldova, Serbia and Ukraine abstained. The reason these Central and Eastern European states did not adopt a definitive stance was the issue of Crimea’s status, and—in Serbia’s case—the status of Kosovo.

Reasons for the initiative. Due to the spherical nature of the Earth, cartographic representations inevitably involve distortions with regard to area, shape, direction and distance. The most well-known and widely used world map today dates back to 1569. It was created by the Flemish cartographer, geographer, and mathematician Gerardus Mercator. Navigators have utilised this technique for centuries due to its ability to preserve angles and directions. However, this led to distortions in the sizes of the landmasses, with these distortions increasing with distance from the equator. Consequently, on Mercator’s map, Greenland appears almost the same size as Africa, even though Africa’s actual surface area is approximately 14 times larger. Europe appears larger than South America, and Canada and Russia appear significantly larger relative to other countries. The Mercator projection continues to serve as the underlying cartographic basis for Google Maps, Apple Maps, and the vast majority of other GPS navigation systems.

The process of transferring the Earth’s three-dimensional surface onto a flat map necessitated compromises. Over time, several projections were developed to correct Mercator’s distortions, including the Gall-Peters and Robinson projections¹. However, none of these achieved widespread adoption. The development of the “Equal Earth” concept in 2018 marked a significant advancement in this field, enabling the preservation of proportional surface areas of countries and continents on a world map². This projection was used in a socio-political campaign launched by the organisations Africa No Filter and Speak Up Africa³, with the aim of fostering debate on education, representation, and perceptions of Africa. In February of this year, the projection was presented by Robert Dussey – then Togo’s Minister of Foreign Affairs – and subsequently endorsed by all 54 member states of the African Union.

This new projection is more than just a technical method for mapping the globe onto a flat surface; it addresses issues of cognitive justice⁴, historical recognition⁵ and equitable representation. Proponents of the new projection

¹ The first was created by James Gall and Arno Peters, and the second by Arthur Robinson; <https://map-projections.net/compare.php?pl=gall-peters&p2=robinson> [14.09.2026].

² Map available at: <https://equal-earth.com/> [14.09.2026].

³ More information on the campaign at: <https://correctthemap.org/> [14.09.2026].

⁴ The concept of cognitive justice is based on recognizing a plurality of knowledges and affirms the right of diverse forms of knowledge to coexist. S. Visvanathan, *The search for cognitive justice*, 2009, <https://unboundedacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/The-search-for-cognitive-justice-visvanatham.pdf> [14.09.2026].

⁵ In the view of the resolution’s authors, this entails promoting accurate geographical knowledge and historical truth, as well as education and awareness-raising; General Assembly, *“Correct the map”: rebalancing global cartographic representation and promoting equitable representation of the world’s regions, particularly Africa*, 4 August 2026, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/80/L.104> [14.09.2026].

argued that map distortions influence education, public understanding, identity, culture, geopolitics, development narratives, and perceptions regarding the scale and potential of nations in Africa, Latin America, and South Asia.

State reactions. The majority of European Union countries expressed their support for the UN resolution. The French Foreign Ministry announced it would abandon the Mercator projection in favour of map projections tailored to specific uses—ones that better reflect actual surface areas and align with the recommendations of cartographers and scientists. This move is viewed as part of France's decolonization efforts. Speaking on behalf of the European Union, the Irish representative emphasised the objective of promoting a fairer and more accurate cartographic representation of the world's regions, with a particular focus on Africa. She added that the new map could not serve as a basis for claims regarding sovereignty, territorial status, delimitation, or internationally recognised state borders. Furthermore, the UK representative expressed concerns about the potential for new map projections to lead to divergent interpretations of the international community's established positions, including those concerning the status of Crimea.

The depiction of Crimea, marked in grey on the new map, while Ukraine appeared in dark green, prompted six countries to abstain from the vote. These were Estonia, Georgia, Lithuania, Moldova, Serbia, and Ukraine. Ukraine stated that it objected to the depiction of Crimea as "completely unacceptable" and inconsistent with other UN resolutions regarding the Russian Federation's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, though it supported the resolution's underlying arguments. Lithuania and Estonia expressed similar positions. Lithuania's Foreign Ministry observed that while the resolution's objective – to provide more accurate representations of the physical size of countries and continents – was commendable, the country could not disregard inaccuracies concerning political borders. Meanwhile, Latvia supported the resolution alongside the majority of EU states, but emphasised that no change in borders had occurred and that Crimea remains and will continue to be part of Ukraine on the maps of both the UN and other international organisations. Despite the inclusion of Russian-occupied territories within the borders of Georgia and Moldova on the new map (Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transnistria), both countries chose to abstain, thereby expressing solidarity with Ukraine.

Serbia was the sixth country to not commit to either option. In this instance, the Foreign Ministry has stated that the issue of Kosovo, depicted on the new map as an independent entity, was the reason for this stance. From the perspective of the Serbian authorities, this is "contrary to the constitutional order and national interests," as voting for the resolution could be interpreted as support for Kosovo's independence.

The United States was the only country to vote against the resolution. US authorities regard "Equal Earth" as a radical ideological project with a view to promoting reparations. Such actions also compromise the credibility and authority of the UN.

Conclusions

1. Maps have a significant impact on our understanding of the world. The depiction of countries and continents can influence perceptions of their actual sizes and reinforce misconceptions. Maps that contain distortions of size and proportion can unconsciously shape power dynamics in international relations or distort perceptions of a state's true potential. This phenomenon is known as "cartographic colonialism." This can reinforce systemic biases in international trade, the direction of development policies, and educational systems.

2. Maps can serve as a useful political tool. A case in point is the recent decisions by the US President regarding the renaming of geographical features located on the country's borders⁶. As of January 20, 2025, the Gulf of Mexico has been renamed the Gulf of America, and as of August 27, 2026, Lake Ontario became Lake America⁷. The renaming of the former is interpreted as an attempt to damage relations with the southern neighbour, while the latter is linked to mounting tensions in relations with Canada. Similarly, a Russian news agency used the

⁶ The explanatory memorandum states that the name change acknowledges the bay's pivotal role in shaping the USA's international economic standing.

⁷ The name "Ontario" derives from the languages of Indigenous peoples of the Americas and was adopted by European settlers in the 17th century.



"Equal Earth" map to point out that Crimea was marked with the same colour as Russia, which, in its view, justified the "legality of Crimea's reunification with Russia"⁸. In reality, the Crimean Peninsula was marked on the map in a colour different from that of Russia (depicted in light green) and Ukraine (marked in dark green). Designating Crimea as part of Russia would have been contrary to international law. Territories illegally incorporated into Russia, the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, were marked as part of Ukraine.

3. Maps can trigger diplomatic interventions. State reactions to the new world map demonstrate that cartography, despite its technical nature, can lead to disputes and decisive diplomatic actions. Following the adoption of the resolution, Japan requested that the UN reconsider the projection of the new world map, which depicted the Kuril Islands as Russian territory. The islands in question, known as the Northern Territories in Japan, are de facto controlled by Russia. The Soviet Union seized them in 1945, yet the Japanese government does not recognise Russian control over them. In a similar development, India lodged a diplomatic protest regarding the depiction of the territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. The new map shows the boundary between Indian-administered areas and Pakistani-controlled regions with a dashed line rather than a solid one. This is a cartographic convention that indicates a disputed or unsettled border status.

4. International organisations have the capacity to be agents of change. As UN resolutions are not legally binding, states and institutions are not obliged to use the new projection exclusively or to abandon the one currently in use. However, it is anticipated that "soft law" – including documents issued by international organisations – will contribute to the updating of curricula and communication systems. The government of Togo is planning to organise an event next year involving UNESCO, the African Union, and international technology companies like Google to discuss ways of implementing the resolution.

⁸ ТАСС, *Крым на карте Equal Earth обозначен тем же цветом, что и РФ*, 4.09.2026, <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/28081323> [14.09.2026].