

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE THIRD PLENARY MEETING¹

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 5 September 1967, at 3.15 p.m.

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Organization of work (agenda item 6) (<i>continued</i>)	10
Reports by Governments on the progress made in the standardization of geographical names (agenda item 7) (<i>continued</i>)	10
Exchange of experience on problems identified in the report of the Group of Experts on Geographical Names (agenda item 8)	12

President:

Mr. BURRILL (*United States of America*)

later,

Mr. BARANOV (*Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*)

Organization of work

[Agenda item 6] (*continued*)

The PRESIDENT said that the steering committee recommended that the Conference should first complete its hearing of reports by Governments on the progress made in the standardization of geographical names, under agenda item 7, and should then take up agenda item 8, entitled "Exchange of experience on problems identified in the report of the Group of Experts on Geographical Names". The committee further recommended that the discussion should concentrate on problems rather than on recommendations for their solution, which could be more usefully taken up in the four principal committees.

Reports by Governments on the progress made in the standardization of geographical names

[Agenda item 7] (*continued*)

Mr. LINDQVIST (Sweden) said that Swedish geographical names were spelled in accordance with the principles laid down in the glossary published by the Swedish Academy. Those names could be divided into three categories: names of administrative divisions; property register names; other names. The official form and spelling of administrative names were universally accepted, and were based *inter alia* on the publications of the Central Bureau of Statistics. The names in the property register were based on decisions taken by the National Land Survey Board. Other names were checked by the Geographical Survey Office in collaboration with the Swedish Place-Names Archives. The general public could be confident, therefore, that all names appearing on Swedish maps had been certified as correct by experts. The collection and examination of the relevant data was the responsibility of the Swedish Place-Names Archives, which were directed by the Royal Place-Names Commission. The commission issued official opinions concerning the names of municipalities, parishes, post offices and railway stations. The

commission might also examine place-names forms on the request of the Board of Shipping and Navigation and other official authorities.

Mr. SPIESS (Switzerland) observed that toponymic problems were particularly complex in his country as a result of the federal system of government, under which each of the twenty-five cantons was guaranteed cultural autonomy; Switzerland had four official languages, and each had a number of local dialects. Accordingly, geographical names were first verified by cantonal commissions in collaboration with the communal authorities, and subsequently standardized at the national level by the Department of Justice and Police and the land registration authorities. The guiding principle was that local usage should be binding. As a result, French and Italian names closely followed standard written forms, while German names showed many dialectal variations. Continuity was deemed essential, for any change in a geographical name created a feeling of uncertainty among the population and might possibly lead to an explosive situation. National maps at the scale of 1:25,000 were therefore based primarily on cantonal recommendations, while those at 1:200,000 differed from the others in some respects.

It was to be hoped that the Conference would take its decisions on the basis of geographical names of particular importance to international trade.

Mr. KHAMASUNDARA (Thailand) said that the action taken by his Government to collect and standardize geographical names was being carried out by the Royal Institute, which after careful consideration submitted all geographical names to the Government for final approval. A study of a number of administrative divisions conducted by the Royal Institute in collaboration with the Royal Thai Survey Department had revealed many discrepancies in the spelling of such names, in both the Thai and the Roman alphabets, and steps had been taken in May 1967 to institute standardization of 621 first and second level administrative divisional names. Thailand was planning to begin field checking during the current year on names appearing on national maps at the scales of 1:50,000 and 1:250,000.

Mr. KOMKOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) recalled that the USSR was a multinational State comprising 130 different linguistic and geographical groups. After the October Revolution, all those groups had been officially recognized and had been freely permitted to develop their own cultural life. Universal literacy had been a primary goal, and in order to attain that goal it had been necessary to prepare standard alphabets, school texts, dictionaries and phonetic systems, not only for Russian but for all the national languages. It had also been necessary to develop a method of transcribing names from other languages, including those which did not use the Cyrillic alphabet into Russian. The establishment of a uniform spelling of geographical names was the responsibility of the

¹ The original text of this record appeared as document E/CONF.53/SR.3.

Chief Administration of Geodesy and Cartography, which had set up a permanent transcription committee. The rules for transcription were now laid down in 103 sets of instructions: fifty-eight for the Soviet Union and forty-five for foreign countries. Later in the Conference his Government would provide more detailed data, including samples of the documents used in its geographical and cartographical work. He hoped that, as a result of the Conference some system could be developed for providing the United Nations, at regular intervals, with information concerning changes in geographical names.

Mr. LEWIS (United Kingdom) said that his delegation's report was in two parts, the first dealing with England, Wales and Scotland and the second with Northern Ireland and overseas territories. His country's national mapping authority was the Ordnance Survey of Great Britain, which was responsible for geographical names in England, Scotland and Wales and published them in its well-known Ordnance maps at 1:2,500. A gazetteer was also published, but only at 1:250,000. In recent years there had been a tendency to use Welsh and Gaelic names for places in Wales and Scotland respectively rather than the English names formerly used. Northern Ireland produced its own large-scale maps and was responsible for the collection and publication of names of its territories.

Mapping of overseas territories was carried out by the Directorate of Overseas Surveys, which was a part of the Overseas Development Ministry. Names policy was defined by the appropriate authority within the territory concerned.

Encouragement was given to the establishment of place-names authorities. Thus, in the British Solomon Islands dependencies a geographical names committee had been established for the collection and recording of geographical names. The British Antarctic Place-Names Committee was similarly responsible for geographical names in the Antarctic.

Other bodies concerned with the recording and spelling of geographical names were the Directorate of Military Survey, which produced medium-scale and small-scale maps as well as aeronautical charts, and the Hydrographic Department of the Admiralty, which was responsible for the production of nautical charts and other navigational documents. Both bodies followed the rules for spelling laid down by the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names. That committee was composed of representatives from a number of government departments and learned societies. Its function was briefly, to formulate transliteration and transcription of place names and to carry out the processing of names in certain cases.

Mr. PEARCY (United States of America) said that the United States Board on Geographic Names had already dealt with some 50,000 domestic names; about 1,000 were being added each year. The board's work included the statement of general principles and their incorporation in established policy. Two gazetteers had been published, one for Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands and the other for Hawaii, but unfortunately both were out of print. Two other gazetteers had recently been issued, for Alaska and the state of Delaware, and were obtainable from the Superintendent of Documents in Washington, D.C. Other documents would be placed on exhibition during the Conference.

His Government's files contained between 2.5 and 3 million standard foreign names, together with about 1 million cross-referenced variants. There was a file on

every part of the world, which was revised and enlarged over a ten-year cycle. Foreign names appeared in more than 100 gazetteers, a list of which would be distributed to participants in the Conference.

The report submitted by his Government described the various methods used for the transliteration of names from languages not written in the Roman alphabet. Agreement had been reached on the spelling of those names after joint studies with the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for United Kingdom official use, and in some cases after direct discussion with the countries concerned.

More than twenty years earlier, the United States Board on Geographical Names had undertaken a study of all the names ever given to geographical features in the Antarctic; shortly afterwards, it had begun to discuss them with the other countries concerned, and a large measure of agreement had already been reached.

The study of undersea names, which was still in the early stages, was being discussed in the International Hydrographic Bureau and the General Bathymetric Committee on Oceanography.

Miss BIDART DE LOPEZ (Uruguay) observed that the problem of geographical names in her country had developed in the course of its long history. Certain names, both in Spanish and in other European languages, had appeared during the age of discovery and the colonial era; others had been used by the various indigenous tribes; and frequently their use had overlapped. The inevitable result had been a highly varied terminology, in which certain terms had come to be considered official despite the doubts entertained by scholars. A Geographical Institute had been founded as early as 1843 and a geographical dictionary of Uruguay had been published early in the twentieth century, but an enormous task still remained to be done. A number of private institutions were already co-operating in that task and her Government was, of course, keenly interested in any technical assistance available from the United Nations. The Organization's work on the standardization of geographical names had her delegation's full support.

Mr. EREN (Turkey) said that work on the standardization of geographical names in Turkey had begun some fifteen years previously. Preliminary action had been undertaken by the Cartographic Service, but the need for co-ordination had soon made it necessary to set up a Special Committee on Geographical Names under the Ministry of the Interior; the committee consisted of cartographers, geographers, historians and linguists, and the Cartographic Institute, the Turkish language Association and the Statistical Institute played an important auxiliary part in its work. Measures taken after the dissolution of the Ottoman empire had made the task somewhat easier, since the territory now occupied by the Republic of Turkey had always been populated by Turks and most place names were Turkish. Nevertheless, considerable difficulties had been created by the adoption of the Latin alphabet in the new Turkish State and by the fact that some topographic features had two or three different names. The special committee had overcome the principal difficulties in that regard, and the Ministry of the Interior had published a preliminary compilation of topographic features, province by province. The committee was also preparing a nomenclature which, when completed, would result in the standardization of geographical names at the national level. The Cartographic Service, to which the committee's work was regularly transmitted, took it into account in publishing new Turkish maps.

Mr. CAHA (Universal Postal Union) said that UPU had prepared two maps for the postal service based on French, as the working language of postal administrations. The agency was particularly concerned with the question of transliteration into French and was preparing a nomenclature of some 450,000 post offices throughout the world belonging to its 133 member States. The work was being done on the basis of information provided by the postal administrations of those States, and the problem was thus being dealt with at the national level. The nomenclature would be published early in 1968.

Some speakers had mentioned postal administrations as useful collaborators in achieving standardization; UPU would be glad to assist the Conference in any possible way.

Mr. ORMELING (International Cartographic Association), speaking at the invitation of the President, said that ICA fully supported the work of the Conference and looked forward to receiving practical suggestions and clear recommendations from it. Map-makers were interested in any attempt at the standardization of geographical names, not for its own sake, but because maps of all kinds served as a basis for economic development throughout the world. They were constantly seeking means of speeding up the long process of mapping by introducing aerial photography, exploring complex systems of automation, standardizing cartographic terms and contributing to the solution of the problem of geographical names. Editors of all kinds of maps, topographic maps on divergent scales and thematic maps, were sooner or later confronted with the thorny spelling problem, the solution of which required much energy and time. Although ICA did not favour uniformity at any price, it was deeply committed to speeding up world map-making. It therefore hoped that a permanent United Nations committee on geographical names would be established and that close co-operation would be established between cartographers, toponymists linguists and geographers.

Mr. LAMBERT (Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research), speaking at the invitation of the President, said that the twelve countries represented on SCAR had deliberately refrained from attempting any standardization of geographical names because the usual practice in Antarctic exploration was to allow the country which first discovered a feature to name it. That country then informed the other members of its action, usually by producing sketch-maps showing the nature and geographical location of the feature. That was often followed by an interchange of gazetteers giving the names, locations and positions of features, together with the basis of name allocation. Duplication had occurred in a minority of cases but, with free exchange of information, there was a marked tendency to adopt the name originally given. Thus SCAR was no authority on the standardization of geographical names, but its members would certainly give full consideration to the recommendations of the Conference.

Mr. ANDERSEN (International Union of Geodesy and Geophysics), speaking at the invitation of the President, recalled that IUGG was a non-governmental organization engaged in the physical study of the earth. It consisted of seven associations covering such disciplines as geodesy, seismology, the physics of the earth's interior, geomagnetism, aeronomy, meteorology and atmospheric physics, physical oceanography, volcanology and scientific hydrology. The agency was naturally interested in the standardization of place names as a means of removing any doubt as to where its observations were made. It was following the Conference with great interest and wished it every

success. The fourteenth General Assembly of the IUGG was due to meet in Switzerland shortly after the end of the Conference and would receive a report on the Conference proceedings.

Mr. MOITORET (International Hydrographic Bureau), speaking at the invitation of the President, said that IHB, with its membership of forty-one countries, had been working for a considerable time on some of the problems referred to the Conference. Mariners had of necessity been international in outlook for as long as there had been nations, and the general aim of IHB was to ensure that, for instance, a Greek navigator using British charts could safely dock a Liberian ship in an Australian port.

Standardization was therefore a very important aspect of the safety of navigation; that had been recognized even before IHB had been set up in 1921. The agency's work had not, of course, been completed, but it was working on a general chart of the oceans and a new standardization of the names of undersea features. A document on the standardization policy approved by the members of IHB would be circulated to the Conference.

Mr. Baranov (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) took the Chair.

Mr. BURRILL (Pan-American Institute on Geography and History), speaking at the invitation of the President, said that PAIGH, an agency of the Organization of American States, was pursuing work of interest to the Conference at the regional level. The Institute had three commissions, on cartography, history and geography respectively, and a Committee on Geographical Terms had been set up by the Commission on Geography. The committee had two main tasks: to prepare a polyglot glossary of all geographical terms for the Americas in English, French, Portuguese and Spanish and to promote international co-operation in the standardization of place names. Considerable progress had been made in both tasks, but there was still much to be done.

The compiler of the geographical dictionary of Guatemala had made his knowledge and experience available to neighbouring Republics and, as a result of that and other technical assistance, a number of gazetteers would be published in the relatively near future. Panama had completed an extensive project for a five-volume geographical dictionary of Panama, containing over 90,000 place names. Many Argentine place names had been collected and studied by the graduate departments of Argentine universities, and the geographical dictionary of Chile was well on the way to completion. The Institute Committee on Geographical Terms was helping to circulate a series of general questions with a view to the production of a polyglot dictionary, and was studying a large number of terms collected in several countries. Papers on problems and their treatment in Guatemala and on terms used in colonial Argentina had been published by the institute.

He himself was working on a glossary of United States place names, involving over 25,000 maps and over 1 million names. He wished to commend the method of studying generic terms and mapping their distribution in a given country; such long and exhaustive study could produce surprising results.

Exchange of experience on problems identified in the report of the Group of Experts on Geographical Names
[Agenda item 8]

The PRESIDENT invited the Conference to consider one by one the problems of domestic standardization of

geographical names listed in section II of the first report of the Group of Experts on Geographical Names.² He first invited comments on problem (a).

Mr. LAMBERT (Australia) said that the practice in his country was to investigate records of early explorations, surveys and land-settlement documents. If the local usage did not differ too widely from the names in those documents, the original name was used but, if the difference was appreciable, the name used in common practice was retained.

Mr. EMMANUEL (Ethiopia) said that, in his country, when mapping parties were sent out to the field, they first approached the local administrator who spoke the national language, and often the local dialect. The latter convened knowledgeable informants from the surrounding area. When place names had been collected in the field, they were brought back to the Institute of Mapping and Geography; the leader of the field party made the transcription into Amharic on the spot. Transliteration from Amharic into English was carried out in the office. Names were then recorded, both in Amharic and English, on standard card forms, mainly for mapping purposes.

Mr. BREU (Austria) said that, in his country, land surveys strictly followed contemporary local usage for geographical names, disregarding old documents except in cases where the topographic feature was very extensive and the literary standard was very old and could not be altered.

Mr. KOMKOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) acknowledged that discrepancies between local and official versions of geographical names presented some difficulty. In the USSR, priority was given to official names, but great care was taken to reflect local appellations in official documents, so that the names should be comprehensible to the local population. Discrepancies were thus largely eliminated.

The PRESIDENT invited comments on problem (b).

Mr. FRASER (Canada) said that, because of the variety of physiographic features, the naming of larger features—especially those whose limits were not clearly defined—sometimes required discussions between physiographic experts and surveyors and, where coastal regions were involved, consultations with specialists in international law. Although such larger features were not always of concern to the general public, there was sometimes strong public feeling about the application of local names to the entire feature or a large part of it. Where possible, the extent of physical features should be based on physiographic homogeneity: their limits should coincide with significant topographic breaks. However, where the usage in published material—such as explorers' journals and early geographical reports—transcended the natural limits it was sometimes necessary to extend the area to which the name applied. One principle of nomenclature recognized in Canada was that it was undesirable to give different names to different parts of a river, even when they were separated by lakes. If possible the same name was applied to the entire river, from headwaters to estuary. In such cases, local usage was given greater weight than other factors, although in unsettled areas it was better to retain the names recorded in historical maps or reports than to adopt new ones.

Mr. MOITORET (International Hydrographic Bureau), speaking at the invitation of the President, drew attention to the IHB special publication No. 23, on the *Limits of*

Oceans and Seas. Problems of official delimitation had been recognized since 1919, and the publication represented an attempt to obtain agreement between national hydrographic offices, whose information for mariners was generally prefaced by broad geographical references. The publication was already in its third edition; further editions could be expected as changes were dictated by advances in oceanography.

Mr. LAMBERT (Australia) said that his Government was concerned to note that the Bureau's publication showed the Great Australian Bight as extending from the south-western tip of Australia to the southernmost point of Tasmania. That was contrary to local usage; Australia would prefer to restrict the Great Australian Bight to a more limited area, and to introduce the term "Austral Sea". He asked what authority should be approached on the matter.

Mr. MOITORET (International Hydrographic Bureau), speaking at the invitation of the President, replied that any special publication of the Bureau was subject to modification at the suggestion of any member State. The Australian Government, as a member, could send a communication through its representative to the Bureau suggesting the change, which would then be put to all members. The decision would be based on a simple majority but, since the matter was of concern only to Australia, the change was unlikely to be opposed.

Mr. GALL (Guatemala) said that no specific principles had been adopted in Guatemala for the naming of geographical features, which was generally based on local usage. The authorities in his country were currently faced with the problem of naming certain physical features in the coastal region, and would welcome expert guidance.

Mr. BURRILL (Pan-American Institute on Geography and History), speaking at the invitation of the President, contended that publication No. 23 of the International Hydrographic Bureau illustrated a problem not specifically identified in the experts' report. The original purpose of the publication had been to provide the masters of sailing vessels with a means of reporting on the general areas in which they were sailing. At the time it had been impossible for them to do so in terms of the physical composition of water bodies but, as oceanographic data became increasingly available, specialists preferred to differentiate water bodies on the basis of water characteristics. In many cases, those characteristics did not correspond to straight lines drawn between headlands, and the delimitation of water bodies on the basis of water characteristics was likely to conflict with delimitations based on other principles.

The PRESIDENT invited comments on problem (c).

Mr. BREU (Austria) drew a distinction between problems arising from the existence of different spellings of the same name and problems arising from the existence of different names for the same feature. In his country, in such cases, preference was mostly given to the spelling which was etymologically correct. Where a mountain was named in two different ways in the valleys on either side of it, both names were indicated on the map, showing which was used in which valley.

Mr. MAHIAR-NAVABI (Iran) said that the prevailing practice in his country was to retain names recorded in historical documents. Although he recognized that it was important to take into account the unity of physical features and geographical limits, he thought it preferable to retain established geographical names where possible.

² See annex, p. 151.

Mr. BLOK (Netherlands) thought that, when there were two conflicting spellings, it was better to choose the one which corresponded more closely to the pronunciation, for the etymology of place names was often obscure and disputed even among etymologists.

The PRESIDENT invited comments on problem (d).

Mr. LAMBERT (Australia) thought that the problem of naming parts of natural features which were named in their entirety, and of naming large features of which parts already had names, was of considerable importance and that the Conference should try to evolve some basic principles for its solution. The name of a group of mountains, for instance, should indicate by its etymology that it referred to such a group, and the names of individual mountains within the group should be clearly indicated. In Australia a problem arose in connexion with rivers which divided into two or more streams subsequently reunited. The practice was to call the separate streams branches of such and such a river. It would be useful if the Conference could give guidance in such matters. He hoped that suitable recommendations would be formulated in Committee I.

Mr. SUN (China) also hoped that some guidance would be given on the naming of rivers and branches thereof. The principal rivers in China had one name from headwaters to estuary, but others had different names in different reaches and branches.

Mr. BURRILL (Pan-American Institute on Geography and History), speaking at the invitation of the President, said that the problem would become increasingly important as development involved increasingly large geographical features, parts of which were already named by local communities hitherto unaware of the extent of the feature as a whole.

The PRESIDENT observed that recommendation VIII of the Group of Experts offered a partial solution to the

problem. It was to be hoped that the Conference could evolve a more complete solution and help the experts to make fuller recommendations on the subject.

Mr. KOMKOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) thought that the Conference should discuss the experts' recommendations in conjunction with the problems of domestic standardization which the experts had identified; it would be difficult to reach definite conclusions on the specific practical problems which delegations were raising, many of which could be solved only after prolonged research.

Mr. LEWIS (United Kingdom) thought that the Conference might try to resolve problems of the kind that arose when two nations applied different names to the same feature on the basis of different concepts. At another level, the Conference could also contribute to the standardization of terms along the lines suggested by the representative of Australia. It would be useful, for instance, to have standard terms for such features as branches of rivers which divided. He saw scope for such practical work in Committees II and IV.

Mr. MASSAQUOI (Liberia) said that the authorities in his country, too, were faced with the problem of naming rivers which currently had different names in the different territories traversed.

Mr. FRASER (Canada) said that, for cartographic convenience, his country's authorities had tried to avoid the use of such terms as the "north-west branch of such and such a river" because there was no room on small-scale maps for such long names. That consideration, he thought was worth bearing in mind.

The PRESIDENT said that it seemed to be the general view that such problems could usefully be considered in greater detail in Committees III and IV and on the basis of the material submitted by participating countries.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.