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UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE  
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL  
NAMES

Geneva, 4-22 September 1967

Dual distribution

DRAFT REPORT OF THE CONFERENCE

Chapter II

RESOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS (in part)

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RESOLUTION 3 -- AUTOMATIC DATA PROCESSING

The Conference,

Recognizing the rapid advances in automatic data processing and the rapid developments in the field of computer technology,

Considering the value of the application of these technical aids in geographical names for various purposes, for listing of geographical names to get a continuously up-to-date file of approved names, for special kinds of names, or for retrieving names according to special categories or other demands,

Noting that it is desirable for the problem of geographical names to be properly taken into account in the design of electronic equipment and in systems for its use,

Recommends that all Member States already engaged in programmes of automatic data processing or which have been involved in discussions on automatic name data processing be requested to exchange information, for which purpose it would be useful to submit the reports in the official languages of the United Nations,

Further recommends that names specialists establish and maintain working channels of communications with the equipment designers, and that the results of such communications be circulated promptly to the names authorities in the Member States,

Requests that the United Nations serve as a documentation centre where information and documents with regard to automatic data processing can be collected and distributed,

Further requests that the United Nations help to develop international standards in relation to geographical coding structures and procedural guidelines.

RESOLUTION 4 - NATIONAL STANDARDIZATION

The Conference,

Recognizing that the national-standardization of geographical names provides economic and practical benefits to individual nations,

Further recognizing that national standardization of geographical names by all nations is an essential preliminary to international standardization,

Requests that the following recommendations on the national standardization of geographical names be reviewed by the proper United Nations authorities,

Further requests the Secretary-General to submit these recommendations for consideration by the Economic and Social Council,

Urges that these recommendations be conveyed to all Member States and interested international organizations for favourable consideration.

RECOMMENDATION A

National Names Authority

It is recommended that as a first step in international standardization of geographical names, each country should have a national geographical names authority:

- (a) consisting of a continuing body, or co-ordinated group of bodies, having clearly stated authority and instructions for the standardization of geographical names and the determination of names standardization policy within the country;
- (b) having such status, composition, function and procedures as will
  - (i) be consistent with the governmental structure of the country;
  - (ii) give the greatest chance of success in the national name standardization programme;
  - (iii) as appropriate, provide within its framework for the establishment of regional or local committees according to area or language;
  - (iv) provide for consideration of the effects of its actions on government agencies, private organizations and other groups and for the reconciliation of these interests; as far as possible, with the long range interests of the country as a whole;
  - (v) make full use of the services of surveyors, cartographers, geographers, linguists and any other experts who may help the authority to carry out its operations efficiently;
  - (vi) permit record keeping and publication procedures that will facilitate the prompt and wide distribution of information on its standardized names, both nationally and internationally.

It is recommended that those countries which have not yet begun to exercise their prerogative of standardizing their geographical names on a national basis, now proceed to do so.

It is further recommended that the appropriate United Nations Office be kept informed by each national names authority of its composition and functions, and of the address of its Secretary.

RECOMMENDATION B

Collection of Geographical Names

For each geographical name which is to be standardized, it is recommended that:

- (a) there be as complete a field and office research as pertinent to provide information on the following points:
  - (i) written and spoken form of the name and its meaning according to local inhabitants;
  - (ii) spelling in cadastral documents and land registers;
  - (iii) spelling on modern and old maps and in other historical sources;
  - (iv) spelling in census reports, gazetteers and other relevant documents of value;
  - (v) spelling used by other local administrative and technical services;
- (b) the local spoken form of the name be recorded on tape and written in the phonetic notation approved by the national names authority;
- (c) the character, extent and position of the feature named be determined and recorded as accurately as possible and that the meaning of the generic terms locally used be clearly defined. (In this regard it should be noted that air photographs can provide useful supplementary information.)
- (d) If possible, at least two local independent sources be consulted for each enquiry.

It is further recommended that personnel responsible for the collection of names should have training adequate to recognize and deal with the linguistic problems (phonetic system, grammatical structure and orthography), geographic phenomena and terminology that they are likely to encounter.

RECOMMENDATION C

Office Treatment of Geographical Names

It is recommended that each names authority formulate, adopt and define the guiding principles and practices that it will normally apply in the course of operation.

These principles and practices should cover:

- (a) Formal procedures to be followed in the submission to the authority of proposals for new names or changes in names.
- (b) Factors that the authority will take into account when considering name proposals, e.g.
  - (1) current usage;
  - (2) historical background;
  - (3) treatment in multilingual areas and in unwritten languages;
  - (4) the extent to which hybrid names should be avoided;
  - (5) avoidance of repetition of names;
  - (6) avoidance of more than one name for one feature;
  - (7) clarification of precise extent of application of each individual geographical name including clarification in naming of the whole and the parts of major features;
  - (8) elimination of objectionable names.
- (c) Rules of writing names applied by the authority.
- (d) Procedures whereby all interested parties may express their views on a name proposal prior to decision by the authority.
- (e) Formal procedures for promulgation of the authority's decisions and for ensuring that standardized names shall appear on the national maps.

In the elaboration of these principles it is recommended that:

- 1. unnecessary changing of names be avoided;
- 2. the spelling of geographical names be as much as possible in accordance with the current orthographic practice of the country concerned, with due regard to dialect forms;
- 3. systematic treatment of names should not operate to suppress significant elements;

4. where some names occur in varying or grammatical forms, the national names authority should consider making one of these forms the standard name (for nouns that can be declined, it will normally be the nominative case);
5. in all countries in whose languages the definite article can enter into geographical names, the national names authority should determine which names contain the definite article and standardize them accordingly. For languages in which both definite and indefinite forms exist for all or most names, it is recommended that standardization be based on one or the other form;
6. all countries set up standards for the use of abbreviations of elements in their geographical names;
7. a system be devised in each country for the treatment of compound names.

It is further recommended that the names authority give adequate publicity to these principles and practices.

RECOMMENDATION D

Multilingual Areas

It is recommended that, in countries in which there exist more than one language, the national authority as appropriate;

- (a) determine the geographical names in each of the official languages, and other languages as appropriate;
- (b) give a clear indication of equality or precedence of officially acknowledged names;
- (c) publish these officially acknowledged names in maps and gazetteers.



RECOMMENDATION E

National Gazetteers

It is recommended that each names authority produce, and continually revise, appropriate gazetteers of all its standardized geographical names.

It is further recommended that each gazetteer, in addition to the standardized names, include as a minimum, such information as is necessary for the proper location and identification of the named features.

In particular, it is recommended that the following be included:

- (a) The kind of feature to which the name applies;
- (b) Precise description of the location and the extent, including a point position reference if possible, of each named feature;
- (c) Provision for the parts of natural features to be additionally defined by reference to the whole and for the names of extended features to be defined as necessary by reference to their constituent parts;
- (d) Such information on administrative or regional areas as is considered necessary and, if possible, reference to a map or chart within which the features lie;
- (e) If there is more than one officially standardized name for a feature, then all should be given, and also provision be made to cross-reference names previously used for the same feature.

When national authorities determine it possible, both technically and economically, they may include such information on geographical names as gender, number, definite and indefinite forms, position of stress, tone and pronunciation in the system of the International Phonetic Association and such other linguistic information as may lead to the better understanding and use of names both nationally and internationally.