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Item 8 of the provisional agenda

Extracts from World Cartography, Volume VII

Submitted by the Secretariat

1. The question of adopting a standard method of writing geographical names on maps in the United Nations
2. Report of the Group of Experts on Geographical Names.

The question of adopting a standard method of writing geographical names on maps in the United Nations

The question of adopting a standard method of writing geographical names on maps was brought before the Economic and Social Council at its fifteenth session in 1953 and was subsequently considered at its twenty-first and twenty-seventh sessions in 1956 and 1959, respectively.

A. PRELIMINARY CONSULTATIONS

The first step taken by the Council in studying the problem was to consult with Governments and appropriate international organizations to ascertain their views, in accordance with resolution 476 A (XV) of 6 April 1953. Accordingly, the Secretary-General sent to the interested parties a communication inviting their comments on the subject.

The first United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Far East, held in Mussoorie, India, in February 1955, studied this question, taking into account the replies then received by the Secretary-General from twenty Governments.¹ The Conference recommended that a committee be set up under the auspices of the United Nations to draft a general framework for maximum international uniformity in the writing of geographical names for consideration by the Economic and Social Council or by an international conference to be called by the Council.²

The Seventh Pan American Consultation on Cartography of the Pan American Institute of Geography and History, held in Mexico City in 1955, concurred with the findings of the Mussoorie Conference and adopted a similar resolution. In addition, the Meeting of Experts on Surveying and Mapping of the Scientific Council of Africa South of the Sahara discussed the problems of geographical names at Bukavu, Belgian Congo, in November 1953, and agreed that toponymy was the concern of the Government of each country.

The report of the Secretary-General to the Economic and Social Council³ on the consultations was based on: (a) replies received from twenty-three Governments: Australia, Burma, Canada, Ceylon, Denmark, the

Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, France, Hungary, India, Israel, Jordan, Libya, Liechtenstein, the Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, the Philippines, Portugal, Sweden, Turkey, the United Arab Republic (Egypt) and the United States of America; (b) information and views submitted by three specialized agencies: the International Telecommunication Union, the Universal Postal Union and the International Civil Aviation Organization; and one inter-governmental organization, the International Hydrographic Bureau; and (c) recommendations adopted by the three regional technical conferences mentioned above.

Most of the Governments and specialized agencies replying to the Secretary-General's communication explicitly favoured the adoption of a standard method of writing geographical names on maps. None of them expressed a contrary opinion. Several reasons were given for supporting this study. For instance, the Government of Sweden felt that there was at present a great deal of confusion in the spelling of geographical names and noted that place names often had different forms in different languages and that sometimes none of those forms corresponded to the local usage. It would, therefore, be considered of great value, not only for cartography, but also for better understanding between different language groups, if an international standard could be evolved and win general acknowledgement. The Government of France pointed out that there had been, in recent years, a very definite and widespread tendency to favour the adoption of a standard method of writing geographical names on maps; the Government of the Netherlands noted that the problem of spelling geographical names was very important to each country, not only from the international standpoint but also with respect to uniformity among the various services and agencies which use geographical names within the country itself.

In practice, the adoption of a standard method of writing geographical names on maps involves the solution of a number of problems, toponymic and linguistic as well as cartographic. These various aspects have already been studied by a number of international organizations and national bodies in connexion with their work and with a view to meeting their own requirements, as, for example, the specifications of the International Map of the World on the Millionth Scale (IMW), the ICAO World Aeronautical Chart and the hydrographic charts for the co-ordination of which the

¹ United Nations, *United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Far East*, vol. 2—*Proceedings of the Conference and Technical Papers* (Sales No.: 56.I.23), pp. 42-47.

² United Nations, *United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Far East*, vol. 1—*Report of the Conference* (Sales No.: 55.I.29), p. 12, paras. 45 and 46.

³ *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Twenty-first Session, Annexes*, agenda item 6.

International Hydrographic Bureau is responsible. The Universal Postal Union (UPU) has published a world map of surface postal communications with place names given in the way indicated in the Directory of Post Offices, published by UPU on the basis of official information. From time to time, international geographical congresses and international congresses of the onomastic sciences have studied those aspects of the question which are of interest to them.

At the national level, the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for British Official Use (PCGN) of the Royal Geographical Society of the United Kingdom has made valuable contributions by publishing rules for dealing with geographical names in various languages. The United States Board on Geographic Names in Washington, D.C., has undertaken similar work for the United States of America. With regard to romanization of other systems of writing, France submitted a study dealing with the transliteration of place names in Arabic, Cyrillic, Greek, Chinese or other characters. The Government of India reported that, at present, it is using the Hunterian system of transliteration. For names in countries bordering Pakistan, Pakistan uses the spellings given in the lists published by the PCGN, with the addition of a number of supplementary rules.

With regard to technical criteria to be applied in the standardization, a number of countries supported the proposal that each geographical name should, as far as possible, be written in accordance with the local version. It was also suggested that each country should endeavour to standardize geographic names in its own system.

The replies from Governments on the question of principles advocated either the use of Roman letters or the adoption of a special single alphabet for the transcription of geographical names, so that names will be pronounced correctly in accordance with the local pronunciation. The proposals in the communication from the Government of Iran (E/2362, annex IV) were concerned with the latter system. In turn, concrete proposals to amend the Iranian system were offered by Israel.

The French Institut géographique national considered that, before deciding what maps should be included in the study, a recommendation should be made for the conclusion of agreements towards an active exchange of maps between cartographic institutes for their mutual documentation, and that all maps might come under such a study "except those intended for a limited or local public or for a public confined within national boundaries . . ."

To attain the desired standardization, the Government of Australia suggested that the most practical approach to the problem would be for the United Nations Secretariat to prepare a draft proposal which could be circulated to Governments and appropriate inter-governmental organizations for comments before placing it for final consideration before a special United Nations conference. On the other hand, Canada proposed that the ICAO maps should be published, without the aeronautical signs, in a single language, with a translation in the four other official United Nations languages on the back of the map. Sweden, on the other hand, con-

sidered that the proposed standardization should follow the principles adopted by the Second International Conference for the International Map of the World on the Millionth Scale (Paris, 1913). The Philippines considered that the uniform system of writing geographical names on nautical charts adopted by the International Hydrographic Bureau might be applied to other maps, while Turkey suggested that the standardization of geographical names should be based on the studies of the International Geographical Union.

Finally, the United States Government felt it desirable that the toponymic and linguistic aspects of writing geographical names should be considered by an international conference, held under appropriate United Nations auspices, before considering the matter from a cartographic point of view. It would be willing to co-operate in drafting a general framework for a programme looking towards maximum international uniformity in the writing of geographical names, for consideration by the United Nations Economic and Social Council or by an international conference called by the Council for that purpose. It would also be willing to co-operate in drafting an agenda for such a conference.

The report was considered by the Council at its twenty-first session, held in April 1956. In the debate, support was expressed for the Australian suggestion that a draft proposal for the adoption of a standard method of writing geographical names on maps should be prepared by the United Nations Cartographic Office for comments by Governments, since a committee should not be established until sufficient preparatory work had been accomplished. In conclusion, the Council adopted a resolution requesting the Secretary-General "to draft, in co-operation with interested international organizations and such experts as he may wish to consult within the limits of budgetary availability, the general framework of a programme looking towards the maximum international uniformity in the writing of geographical names, to submit it to the Governments of States Members of the United Nations or members of the specialized agencies for their comments, and to report to the Council at a subsequent session".⁴

B. DRAFT PROGRAMME FOR ACHIEVING INTERNATIONAL UNIFORMITY IN THE WRITING OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

On 26 June 1958, the Secretary-General circulated to Governments of States Members of the United Nations or members of the specialized agencies for their comments a paper entitled "Draft programme for achieving international uniformity in the writing of geographical names".

The main body of the paper is given below.

International uniform standard methods of writing geographical names

The adoption of a uniform standard method of writing geographical names involves two basic questions — namely, the standardization in one form of a geographical name by the country

⁴ Economic and Social Council resolution 600 (XXI), para. 4.

concerned and the adoption of standard methods of transliteration or transcription of the accepted form into other languages. Although the first question is a domestic matter and the concern of the Government itself, appropriate international co-operation in this field could promote common methods and procedures and, subsequently, might facilitate the development of an international uniform method of transliteration or transcription. As to the second question, obviously any issue would involve more than one language group.

(a) *Standardization at the national level*

To achieve standardization of geographical names at the national level, several Governments have set up special bodies to study the problem, to co-ordinate national effort and to make decisions in specific cases. These bodies are also concerned with transliteration of foreign names into their own language for official publications. Moreover, the International Congress of Onomastic Sciences studied the question from the linguistic point of view. A systematic exchange between countries of technical information on the subject — special studies, technical decisions, gazetteers, etc. — should prove helpful. Such an exchange could be arranged either through bilateral arrangements between Governments or through a central clearing centre.

(b) *Adoption of general principles for international standard methods*

With regard to the adoption of international uniform standard methods of transliteration or transcription of geographical names, account must be taken of the work already carried out in this field by national agencies and international organizations in connexion with their geographical studies and cartographic publications. To speed up international uniformity two fundamental problems must be solved at an early stage, and the decisions taken should serve as guiding principles in formulating rules for transliteration or transcription when dealing individually with different languages.

One of these problems is the selection of the element in any particular geographical name by which it can be converted into various systems of writing. This selection may be determined by the sound of the name, its written form, or its meaning. The other problem is the acceptance for international use of a system of writing. Such a system could be based on an existing or new alphabet, or on phonetic symbols.

The above two problems are closely related and should be studied together, taking into account not only present, but also future, needs. It would be useful if Governments, when commenting on the present draft programme, could make known their views on them, both from a national and an international point of view. The replies received may indicate that the possibility exists of international agreement being reached on these two questions and that fruitful co-operation may be expected in the future in dealing with detailed issues. They may, on the other hand, reveal that further preliminary studies are required before such a possibility can be contemplated. In any event, the information provided by these replies would facilitate the work of the Economic and Social Council in considering the proposal made by the first United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Far East and the Seventh Pan American Consultation on Cartography for convening an international conference on geographical names.

(c) *Preparation of international transliteration methods*

The writing systems now in use can be divided generally into two groups: alphabetical and non-alphabetical. In alphabetical writing, the Roman alphabet is used in most European languages. Considerable work has already been done in the romanization of certain non-alphabetical systems.

In view of the numerous systems of writing and their complexities, which no one expert could be expected to master, it would not

seem practicable to attempt a solution of the detailed problems of a universal system for the writing of geographical names until a study had first been made of the results already achieved in this regard in the different languages. Small working committees might be set up of representatives of countries using the same system of writing to study common problems and to develop guiding principles for a systematic conversion of the written geographical names. Experts in the other systems of writing and languages involved could be invited to participate in the work. The work of such committees might also deal with detailed questions, including draft rules for international adoption.

It would not be necessary to organize simultaneously committees to deal with all systems of writing. At the first stage, efforts could be concentrated on those systems which are of most general international concern. However, a sufficient number of languages must be studied to ensure that adequate consideration is given to the problems involved. When a sufficient number of these committees have completed their work, it may be found useful to arrange for a small group to review the various experts' reports and make recommendations to the Economic and Social Council.

(d) *International co-ordination and liaison*

International uniformity in writing geographical names, which has to be achieved gradually in accordance with world progress and needs, is obviously a long-range undertaking. Lack of international co-operation in this field would tend to result not only in duplication of work in individual countries, but also in unco-ordinated development which would make international uniformity more and more difficult of attainment. The possibility might therefore be considered of arranging for information on work undertaken and achieved to be received at and be made available from some central point.

The draft programme was circulated to the Second United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Far East, held in Tokyo in 1958, under item 13 (d) of the Conference's agenda, "International standardization of names, spelling and transliteration, and report on progress made in drafting the general framework of a programme looking towards uniformity in the writing of geographic names (paragraph 4 (a) of resolution 600 (XXI), adopted by the Economic and Social Council on 2 May 1956)", together with comments received from twelve Governments up to 10 October 1958. It was examined in conjunction with two other papers⁵ submitted to the Conference, one from the United Kingdom and the other from the Federal Republic of Germany. The findings of the Conference are set forth in the following resolution:

" *The Conference,*

" *Recognizing* the necessity for international standardization of names, spelling and transliteration,

" *Noting* that at present only a small measure of international agreement on transliteration has been achieved,

" 1. *Recommends* for consideration the principles outlined in the paper prepared by the Secretariat, dated 15 September 1958, and in the background paper submitted by the United Kingdom, dated 4 September 1958;

⁵ See United Nations, *Second United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Far East*, vol. 2 — *Proceedings of the Conference and Technical Papers* (Sales No.: 61.L.8), pp. 240-244.

"2. *Suggests* that the most suitable agency for the implementation of international standardization of names, spelling and transliteration is the United Nations acting by way of a parent body composed of national representatives and free to confer with appropriate authorities, official and academic, through subordinate study groups concerned with regional problems."

The report of the Secretary-General to the Economic and Social Council on his consultations with Governments regarding his draft programme was based on replies from twenty-two countries: Belgium, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Federation of Malaya, Ghana, Iran, Ireland, Israel, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, the Philippines, Spain, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America. The information submitted and the views expressed can be summarized as follows.

(a) *Standardization of geographical names at the national level*⁶

Many Governments in their replies related what measures have been and are being taken to co-ordinate their work in this field. Belgium stated that, since it is a country where several languages are used, the responsible agency is the Military Geographical Institute, which, in conformity with the Decree of the Regent of 20 December 1949, carries out detailed studies of place names and submits these names, together with supporting information, to the Commission royale de toponymie et de dialectologie for further examination and for any new proposals which the Institute may adopt, in principle, keeping also in mind the importance of legibility for the maps published by the Institute. In Chile, the Instituto Geográfico Militar is the agency responsible for the writing of geographical names of the country. The Chilean Institute has a prepared systematic procedure which facilitates the methodical, detailed and careful study of each place name before it is put into official use on maps and other publications. The Institute is also responsible for the preparation of a new geographic dictionary of Chile. The Dominican Republic considers the problem important and because of its complexity feels that it would be appropriate to establish a committee responsible for achieving uniformity in the writing of that country's geographical names. The Federal Republic of Germany established, in January 1959, the Ständiger Ausschuss für die deutsche Rechtschreibung geographischer Namen (Permanent Committee on the Writing of Geographical Names in German), whose membership is made up of experts in geography and cartography. Ghana reports that the co-ordination of national effort to determine the correct spelling and transcription of place names is one of the functions of the Bureau of Ghana Languages, but the final authority for the accepted spelling of these names is the Director of Surveys. The Government of Ghana also notes that the Roman script is used in the transcription of geogra-

⁶ For part (a) of the draft programme, see p. 3.

phical names. Ireland states that the transliteration of Gaelic into the Roman alphabet with regard to cartographical procedure is the same as for literary works and therefore is a matter of common occurrence and practice. In Israel, according to law, the Government Names Committee affiliated to the Prime Minister's Office decides the correct form for writing geographical names and also names geographical features which do not already have a name. On maps published by the Survey of Israel using the letters of the Latin alphabet, the method of transliteration used is based on the RGS-II system of the Royal Geographical Society of the United Kingdom — with some slight changes advanced by the Hebrew Language Academy. In New Zealand the authority which assigns new place names and which may amend existing place names is the New Zealand Geographic Board⁷ empowered by the New Zealand Geographic Board Act of 1946. The Survey of Pakistan uses the Hunterian system for all spellings of geographical names transliterated in Pakistan. In the Philippines the Roman alphabet is in use; whenever absolute standardization of place names is required, the English spelling is adopted. Spain agrees with the draft programme that the exchange between countries of technical information on the writing of geographic names is very important and also informs the Secretary-General that it is endeavouring to standardize the toponomy of Spanish geography and is doing this in the Spanish geographical atlas now being prepared. The United States of America has recommended that the United Nations should provide encouragement and guidance to those nations which do not already have a geographical names organization, in order to enable them to establish such a body and to produce their respective national gazetteers at an early date. Most of the other Governments replying recognized the necessity of national standardization of geographical names and indicated their agreement to the Secretary-General's draft programme on standardization at the national level.

(b) *General principles for international standard methods*

Belgium, Canada, Ghana and Nicaragua consider that the problems of adopting general principles for international standard methods are the responsibility of linguistic experts. Iran forwarded its "Pronunciation key used in the Iranian Geographical Dictionary",⁸ which is in four parts: signs (using Latin letters); Iranian equivalents; French pronunciation and English pronunciation. The Federation of Malaya recommends that the selection of a written geographic name to be converted into other writing systems should be determined by its meaning. The Federation considers that the adoption of an existing writing system for international use is feasible provided it is a basic alphabet with phonetic signs added to facilitate its use for the writing of all geographic names. The Chief Geographical Adviser of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Panama

⁷ For the rules of nomenclature adopted by this Board, see *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Twenty-seventh Session, Annexes*, agenda item 6, p. 12.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Annexes, agenda item 6, p. 10.

states in a memorandum⁹ that he does not consider the use of an international phonetic alphabet feasible at this time or even in the relatively distant future since it would only serve to complicate the problem at hand in the writing of geographical names and, moreover, he feels it would conflict with the respect due to the various different cultures as a basis of international understanding and co-operation. Spain feels it is desirable that the Roman alphabet should be adopted with the addition of special symbols. The United Kingdom takes the view that the most satisfactory basis for the standardization of geographical names is to use the written form rather than the sound of the name or its meaning and that the Roman alphabet, supplemented with appropriate diacritical marks, would provide the most effective means of standardizing the writing of such names.

(c) *Preparation of international transliteration methods*

Most of the countries expressed their agreement with the draft programme in this undertaking. Belgium considered the preparation of such methods useful so long as countries with identical languages could reach an understanding on the writing of geographical names beforehand. Canada suggested that the Economic and Social Council should encourage the setting up of regional committees of experts to achieve uniformity in writing geographical names among language groups of a region. Chile agreed to the setting up of regional conferences among countries using similar alphabets. Costa Rica would confine itself at present to offering co-operation on the subject in the American regional community. Austria and Switzerland are joined with the Federal Republic of Germany in the Permanent Committee mentioned previously.¹⁰ Ghana does not consider that this is a matter of great interest from the cartographic point of view at the present time. Luxembourg is prepared to co-operate in any committees formed for the purpose of achieving international uniformity in the writing of geographical names. The Federation of Malaya agrees with the draft programme and states that it should be implemented immediately. The memorandum from Panama states that such working groups are likely to be more successful if they are guided and co-ordinated by a central body; the same is also noted as applying to the convening of an international conference on the subject, provided such a meeting is preceded by sufficient preparatory work. The Philippines is willing to participate in any international conferences as proposed in the draft programme. The United States of America feels that within the limits of budgetary availability, the Secretary-General should sponsor conferences of regional working groups representing countries which use the same system of writing.

(d) *International co-ordination and liaison*

Several Governments commented on the necessity of having a central agency which would receive and make

⁹ See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Twenty-seventh Session, Annexes*, agenda item 6, pp. 12-14.

¹⁰ See p. 4 of the present article.

available to all countries information on the accomplishments of the various countries in this work. Chile felt that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) should be used as the central office for co-ordination and liaison. Costa Rica, the Federation of Malaya, Ghana and Panama agreed to the importance of creating a central co-ordinating agency, and in the view of Panama, such a body should be created within the United Nations, and should have broader functions than merely collecting and distributing information on the subject. Iran found it desirable to have the United Nations consider the compilation of a uniform international alphabet. The United States of America proposed that the United Nations Secretariat should act as a clearing house for geographical names, being responsible for collecting gazetteers and information, for information on techniques and systems, and for disseminating to Member States all documents and information collected, using existing United Nations periodicals.

In sum, the suggestions for action by the United Nations can be listed as follows:

(a) That the United Nations should establish a central international body which might be called the "International committee on geographical names";¹¹

(b) That the United Nations should provide encouragement and guidance to those nations which have no national organization for the standardization and co-ordination of geographical names to establish such an organization and to produce national gazetteers at an early date;

(c) That the United Nations should sponsor, within the limits of the available financial resources, conferences of regional working groups representing the countries which use the same system of name writing, in order to develop guiding principles for attaining uniformity in domestic name procedures and for the standardization of the methods used in the transliteration of foreign names;

(d) That the Secretariat of the United Nations should act as a central clearing house for geographical names, carrying out the following functions: (i) the collection of gazetteers and information concerning the technical procedures adopted by Member States for the standardization of domestic names; (ii) the collection of information on the techniques and systems used by Member States in transliterating the geographical names of other countries, and (iii) the dissemination to Member States of all documents and information collected, utilizing existing United Nations periodicals wherever feasible.

C. FURTHER STEPS TAKEN BY THE COUNCIL

The Secretary-General's report was considered at the twenty-seventh session of the Economic and Social Council. The debates indicated a general agreement on the Secretary-General's draft programme. Several

¹¹ For detailed functions of the programme, see *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Twenty-seventh Session, Annexes*, agenda item 6, annex I, part B, sect. 16, pp. 12-14.

members felt that the proposed meetings of working groups, each representing a system of writing, would be of primary importance after, of course, suitable national standards had already been, or were about to be, established. One member of the Council considered that an international committee should be established to handle the problem at both the national and international levels. Most members considered it desirable to have a meeting of a group of experts to study and consider the technical problems of the domestic standardization of geographical names. On 23 April 1959 the Council adopted, by sixteen votes to none with two abstentions, resolution 715 A (XXVII), reading as follows:

“ *The Economic and Social Council,*

“ *Having considered* the report of the Secretary-General concerning international co-operation on cartography (E/3209 and Add.1-4),

“ *Noting* the draft programme for achieving international uniformity in the writing of geographical names (E/3209, para. 11), which was transmitted by the Secretary-General to the Governments of Member States for comment,

“ *Considering* the comments on the draft programme that have been received from the Governments,

“ 1. *Requests* the Secretary-General:

“ (a) To provide encouragement and guidance to those nations which have no national organization for the standardization and co-ordination of geographical names to establish such an organization and to produce national gazetteers at an early date;

“ (b) To take the necessary steps to ensure the following central clearing house functions for geographical names:

“ (i) Collection of gazetteers and information concerning the technical procedures that each Member State has adopted for standardization of domestic names;

“ (ii) Collection of information on the techniques and systems used by each Member State in the transliteration of the geographical names of other countries;

“ (iii) Dissemination to Member States and, upon request, to any working groups established on a com-

mon linguistic basis, of all documents and information collected, utilizing existing United Nations periodicals wherever feasible;

“ 2. *Further requests* the Secretary-General:

“ (a) To set up a small group of consultants chosen, with due regard to equitable geographical distribution and to the different linguistic systems of the world, from those countries having widest experience of the problems of geographical names:

“ (i) To consider the technical problems of domestic standardization of geographical names, including the preparation of a statement of the general and regional problems involved, and to prepare draft recommendations for the procedures, principally linguistic, that might be followed in the standardization of their own names by individual countries;

“ (ii) To report to the Council at an appropriate session, in the light of its discussion on the above points, on the desirability of holding an international conference on this subject and of the sponsoring of working groups based on common linguistic systems;

“ (b) To invite Governments of countries interested and experienced in the question to make available, at his request, and at their own expense, consultants to serve on the above group.”

D. DOCUMENTATION AND STUDY OF THE PROBLEMS OF DOMESTIC STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

In pursuance of the resolution mentioned in the previous paragraph, a preliminary list of reference materials dealing with geographical names was compiled by the Secretariat and published in *World Cartography*, volume VI, 1958.¹³

Six Governments — China, France, Guatemala, Iran, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America — agreed to make available to the Secretary-General one expert in the field, at their own expense. The meeting of the Group was held at United Nations Headquarters from 20 June to 1 July 1960. The report of the Group, which was submitted to the thirty-first session of the Council held in April 1961, is reproduced elsewhere in this volume.

¹³ See United Nations, *World Cartography*, vol. VI, 1958 (Sales No.: 60.I.10), pp. 57-69.

Report of the Group of Experts on Geographical Names

FOREWORD

The Group of Experts on Geographical Names was set up by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in pursuance of resolution 715 A (XXVII) of the Economic and Social Council. Under this resolution, it had the following terms of reference:

“(i) To consider the technical problems of domestic standardization of geographical names, including the preparation of a statement of the general and regional problems involved, and to prepare draft recommendations for the procedures, principally linguistic, that might be followed in the standardization of their own names by individual countries;

“(ii) To report to the Council at an appropriate session, in the light of its discussion on the above points, on the desirability of holding an international conference on this subject and of the sponsoring of working groups based on common linguistic systems.”

This report was prepared during the meeting held by the Group at the Headquarters of the United Nations, New York, from 20 June to 1 July 1960 with Dr. M. F. Burrill as chairman and Mr. A. Pégorier as rapporteur.

The Group discussed the various questions before it on the basis of experience gained by the experts in their participation in their respective national work in standardization of geographical names and in international co-operation in onomastic science. The Group studied the draft programme for achieving international uniformity in the writing of geographical names, prepared by the Secretary-General, and the comments and information received from Governments.¹ Special attention was paid to those parts dealing with domestic standardization. In its deliberations, account has been taken of the work achieved by the United Nations specialized agencies — the Universal Postal Union and the International Telecommunication Union — by regional inter-governmental organizations — the Pan American Institute of Geography and History and the Committee on Technical Co-operation of Africa South of the Sahara — by the two United Nations Regional Cartographic Conferences for Asia and the Far East, and by international scientific organizations, such as the International Committee on Onomastic Sciences and the International Organization for Standardization. The

¹ *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Twenty-seventh Session, Annexes*, agenda item 6, documents E/3209, para. 11 and annex 1, and E/3209/Add.1.

Group also benefited from information supplied by observers and the Secretariat during its debates.

The Report is composed of four sections:

- I. Need for standardization;
- II. Problems of domestic standardization of geographical names;
- III. Recommendations on problems of domestic standardization of geographical names;
- IV. Question of calling an international conference and sponsoring of working groups.

It has been apparent from the comments submitted by countries to the Secretary-General and indeed from the discussions of the Group that one of the first difficulties to be overcome is that of semantics. The Group therefore proceeded to clarify for purposes of discussion the meanings that are or might be attached to terms expected to be used. A list of these terms is to be found in annex I.

It may be useful at this point to refer to two of these — the term “domestic standardization”, which was accepted for use in the sense of “the process whereby the authorized agency fixes a name or names on behalf of the users thereof, whether such use becomes compulsory or not” and the term “geographical name” which was accepted to refer to “a proper name, consisting of one or more words, used to designate an individual geographic entity, such as a mountain, river or city; the expression embraces both feature names and place names”.

A list of national authorities dealing with geographical names in various countries is annexed to this report (annex II) in order to facilitate correspondence between them. Omissions or errors should be reported to the United Nations Secretariat.

List of participants at the meeting of the Group of Experts on Geographical Names

Members of the Group

- Dr. Meredith F. Burrill (United States of America),
Chairman
Mr. André Pégorier (France), *Rapporteur*
Mr. P. J. M. Geelan (United Kingdom)
Professor Saïd Nafisi (Iran)
Mr. Alfredo Obiols (Guatemala)
Professor Mo Tsao (China)

Observers

(a) Governments

Mr. Omar Sharaf (United Arab Republic)
Dr. Abou Bakr Abdel Ghaffar (United Arab Republic)
Dr. Albrecht Grussner (Federal Republic of Germany)

(b) National agency

Mr. John G. Mutziger (United States Board of Geographical Names)

Secretariat

Mr. Roberto M. Heurtematte, Commissioner for Technical Assistance, representing the Secretary-General

Mr. Louis Delanney

Dr. Te-Lou Tchang, Secretary of the Group

I. NEED FOR STANDARDIZATION

The Group fully agrees with the comments of the Government of Belgium² in reply to the Secretary-General's inquiry that "standardization from the geographical point of view appears not only desirable, but even necessary". The need for rapid development of countries has led Governments to undertake large projects for which the planning requires accurate maps, and statistical and demographic data. The group is aware of the fact that lack of standardized names has caused difficulty in the work of map makers, statisticians, census takers and others, leading to undue and harmful delay and mistakes. The effects of confusion in geographical names are felt not only by geographers and those concerned with national and international affairs, since geographical names constitute one of the required elements of identification in administrative and legal documents, but also by individuals, since people all over the world now have occasion to refer to, identify, or even go to a place that their ancestors either never heard of or considered so far away and inaccessible as to be of no concern.

Many have experienced the discrepancy and confusion existing in place names in various editions of maps of an area, even on one map or in one document. Such a discrepancy has often resulted in unnecessary research, wasting both money and time.

To fulfil their immediate need, many agencies and private publishers have compiled name lists for their own use. Such temporary measures may have been unavoidable especially in countries in which no national names authorities operate; but the uncoordinated efforts of many bodies would also complicate further the national effort in standardization. The Group is con-

vinced that the sooner the appropriate guiding procedures by national standardization of geographical names are established, the easier and the quicker the objective of uniformity in the writing of geographic names can be achieved. Along a similar line, the Group stressed the need for national names authorities to bear in mind international standardization problems when deciding guiding principles for national standardization.

The Group noted with interest that the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 715 A (XXVII) has requested the Secretary-General (a) to provide encouragement and guidance to those nations which have no national organization for the standardization and co-ordination of geographical names to establish such an organization and to produce national gazetteers at an early date, and (b) to take the necessary steps to ensure the central clearing house functions for geographical names. The Group was informed that considerable material has already been gathered and that a bibliography on gazetteers is being published in the United Nations Cartographic Bulletin, *World Cartography*, volume VI.³

The Group also noted that some beginnings of international standardization have, in fact, already been made.

II. PROBLEMS OF DOMESTIC STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

The following problems are recognized by the Group to be important and widespread. They are set forth here as an aid to their recognition at the earliest possible stage in a national standardization programme. The Group wishes to state explicitly that the list of problems set out in this section is recognized not to be complete or exhaustive. Others will surely come to light as programmes go forward in many countries.

- (a) *How to determine the actual name and its correct writing? What weight should be given to published usage, local usage established by field investigation or historical evidence under various conditions?*

The methods used in assembling the evidence of name usage have an important bearing on the quality of the standardization work. Different methods may be called for in different countries, or even for different classes of names in the same country, depending upon the nature of the names and the competence of personnel, and the extent to which names of administrative entities are fixed by law or other official action. In any case, it is not easy in any country to train people to assemble evidence on geographical names with full competence and objectivity. When the evidence is uncertain as to the correct form or writing, especially when forms in local use are at variance with the forms used on maps or in historical documents, the decision may be difficult unless broad guiding principles are stated and followed.

² *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Twenty-seventh Session, Annexes, agenda item 6, document E/3209, annex 1.*

³ United Nations publication, Sales No.: 60.I.10. See pp. 57-69.

- (b) *How to determine the extent of physical features to which names properly apply, such as the limits of a mountain range or of a bay? Again, what weight should be given to published usage, local usage or historical evidence?*

For standard names to be applied in a uniform way by all users, the extent of the physical feature to which the name refers must be as explicit as possible. This sometimes is difficult but an approach to it can be made and it is useful to anticipate the difficulties. This problem is closely related to (a) above.

- (c) *How to select one name from several having some basis for acceptance?*

It will often happen that a geographic entity will have more than one name. Sometimes each of the different names will have considerable support in usage. Here, again, guiding principles can be most helpful.

- (d) *What to do about (1) names for parts of natural features that have names in their entirety, and (2) names for large features for which only parts have names?*

When names are proposed for, or selection must be made from several names for, parts of a feature that has an over-all name, the question will arise as to the extent to which such names should be treated systematically. This problem arises frequently with watercourses. In some cases the local people have names for parts of large features, but only for those parts with which they are familiar, and not for the whole feature with which they are not familiar or to which they have little need to refer. A name for the entire feature may become needed as development of the country proceeds, as in the case of projects involving river basins.

- (e) *How to treat existing names from unwritten languages or from minority languages (written or unwritten) or from dialects and regional forms of the principal languages?*

Although some countries have begun to work on these problems, much remains to be done. Each country should solve these problems quickly and satisfactorily, preferably in concert with other countries whose experience can be exploited to advantage.

- (f) *How to choose between syntactical or grammatical variations of the same name?*

For names in languages like Greek where variations such as *Ákra Málta*, *Ákra tis Máltas* and *Ákra Máltas* occur on different official or semi-official sources, decision on one form or other, name by name, should be made if either domestic or international standardization is to be achieved, since examples are known in many countries of apparently parallel forms that actually distinguish two entities.

- (g) *What to do about optional parts of certain names which serve as part of titles or to distinguish places of the same name?*

The occurrence of variation of forms such as *Rothenburg ob der Tauber* and *Rothenburg* on different sources

will make standardization difficult unless either such variation is eliminated or the conditions stated expressly under which the optional name element shall be or shall not be used.

- (h) *What criteria should be established for retention of established names vs. substitution of new names?*

There will arise from time to time in any country situations in which a choice must be made between retaining a well-known name and substituting a new or altered name. An established name performs the function of a geographic name more efficiently than a new one until the new one becomes accepted. On the other hand an established name that is duplicated or is otherwise confusing may be less efficient than a new one that does not have these faults. If the choice is based on relative efficiency it will generally be easy; otherwise, it may be difficult to make and to justify.

- (i) *How much control of commemorative naming should be exercised, and in what manner?*

If a geographic nomenclature is to become more or less orderly, new naming has to conform to a pattern. Some degree of control is generally possible, and, if shown to be in the public interest, is generally acceptable. The emotional storms that sometimes accompany proposed new naming involving the names of living persons can generally be avoided by an explicit statement of policy and adherence to it without exception.

- (j) *What to do about duplication of names, and when is it excessive?*

Complete avoidance of duplication is an ideal that is not easily attained. Use of the same name for different populated places occurs in every country and in some countries excessively. This is also true for names of other geographic entities. Some kinds of names such as those with a descriptive term as the specific element of a natural feature name (for example, *Red Hill*) are repeated over and over. The degree to which duplication causes confusion, and should therefore be eliminated or reduced, depends in part on the nearness of the named entities to one another and the frequency with which the names are used by persons who live at some distance from the entities. It follows that a given instance of duplication will become more and more troublesome as people widen their knowledge of other than local areas and increase their mobility.

On the other hand, wholesale changing of the names concerned to achieve the ideal is not likely to meet with popular enthusiasm.

- (k) *How to choose between systematic rendition vs. retention of forms in being, when they differ?*

In treating a given class of names or names in a given region in a country there may be considerable advantage in systematic rendition of those names, but the forms resulting are likely to differ in some, perhaps many, cases from forms established in use. No formula for solution of this problem is suggested for universal use, and the extent to which a formula can be applied in a

single country will probably vary. It is, however, a problem to which early attention might well be given in a country where the written forms of names are not already well fixed.

- (l) *Shall printing form for names be made uniform and shall it agree with printing form for the language as a whole ?*

In some languages, as in German, the printing form for ordinary running text is practically uniform, but the printing form for geographic names is not regular (cf. Müller Grosses Deutsches Ortsbuch: Gross Heide located in Kreis Lüchow-Dannenberg but Grossheide located in Kreis Norden). Sometimes unification of two words reflects different meaning or pronunciation.

- (m) *What principles or policies can be adopted to reduce subjectivity in deciding names ?*

The complete avoidance of subjectivity in standardizing names is probably not possible. However, to the extent that it can be reduced the process will go on more easily and the resulting standard names will have more stability. Principles and policies clearly stated and demonstrably in the public interest are perhaps the most effective step towards objectivity.

- (n) *How to bring about local acceptance of nationally standardized names ?*

Unless the standardized names are accepted locally there will be continued and troublesome confusion. The procedures that will be effective may vary with the attitude of peoples towards independent thinking and the function of their national government, and with the degree of literacy. Since attempts to modify local usage on naming practice by edict have generally failed, it appears that people will not ordinarily give up a geographic name or accept a new one without reasons that they consider valid.

- (o) *How to determine and express the location of geographic entities to a precision necessary for all needs ?*

Although in some areas precise location by geographical co-ordinates must wait for better geodetic control, minimum requirements will have to be set.

- (p) *How to set up a standard designating procedure which will define geographic entities consistently and unambiguously ?*

This is a far more complicated problem than is generally appreciated. A full solution may be found, partial solution certainly. The first step is to recognize the problem. Complications arise from several directions. One is the *bedeutungsfeld* (field of meaning) of common nouns ordinarily used for geographic features, which appears to be wider than anyone had suspected.

Another is the difference in the way people categorize nature and experience, even within a country. Features named and referred to in communication in one area may not be recognized as entities in another area, even if the same phenomena occur there. For instance:

Montagnette, signifying a pasture on intermediate slopes in the Alps, is a concept not known in all of France and *Hill*, in the sense of a steep place in a road, is a concept employed in parts of the United States but not everywhere. It is not easy for anyone to accept the fact that words having a clear meaning to him may have another meaning or no meaning to someone else. However, once this is accepted the way is open to discovery of whole new sets of facts about the toponymy of a country and to understanding of the phenomena involved. Research on this problem will be slow and difficult, but it will be rewarding. For practical and immediate solution consideration may be given to explicit definition of standard designator terms. (Note also (q) 1.) There was general agreement on the need for glossaries of geographic terms that will include and make clear the varied meanings of geographic terms used in names, and the varied terms used for the same things. There would also be value in taking account of geographic "neologisms".

- (q) 1. *How to write the names of all entities so that generic terms are distinguishable from designations accompanying names ?*

Most names of physical features, though not all, contain a generic element (for example, *river*, *hill*, etc.) that indicates the nature of the named entity. Some of those terms may be commonly omitted in familiar reference, others never or seldom omitted. Since, as noted under (p) the generic term itself may not be unambiguous and some names (for example, *Die Eiffel*, or *Pelvoux*) do not contain a generic element, it is necessary to indicate in the standardizing process what kind of entity is being named. For unambiguous use, it will be necessary to include the generic element in the name and to indicate whether it is commonly omitted.

- (q) 2. *How to write the names of all entities so that abbreviations are unambiguous ?*

For example, *M. Aleksandrovs kaya* is ambiguous if it can be interpreted as either *Malaya Aleksandrovs kaya* or *Malo-Aleksandrovs kaya*; *N. Lésvos* if either *Nisos Lésvos* or *Nomós Lésvos* could be understood.

- (r) *How to ensure that definite articles be included in names in which they are essential for both domestic and international use ?*

Name sources for some languages in which a definite article may or may not be an integral part of a name are often very inconsistent. For such languages as Arabic, Norwegian, Albanian and Romanian the presence or non-presence of the definite article should be determined and stated for each name.

- (s) *How to document name spellings fully in the Arabic alphabet area ?*

Arabic alphabet names, as they are usually printed without vowel points, tashdids, hamzehs, and sukūns, and being mostly out of context, are often ambiguous to the speaker of the language concerned and always a problem to speakers of other languages. It will continue

to be a problem until names standardization in Arabic alphabet areas regularly provides complete written forms for all place names. It is also in point that, since modern practice has come to require the rendition of Arabic, Persian and other Arabic alphabet names in terms of standard language forms, such documentation is a prerequisite to international acceptance of nationally standardized names. Similar problems may arise with Siamese, Amharic and other languages.

(t) *How to determine the reading of names in ideographic script ?*

Since the reading of Sino-Japanese and Sino-Korean characters is a matter of special knowledge name by name, the names will not be fully intelligible to all until names standardization regularly provides *kana* spellings for Japanese names and *han'gūl* spellings for Korean names.

(u) *How to provide such useful information on names as gender, position of stress and pronunciation ?*

In many languages names printed or listed without indication of such features as gender, stress and pronunciation cannot be used consistently and intelligibly either at home or abroad.

(v) *How to set up a name-standardizing body in a country that does not have one ?*

There is a wide variation in the status of such bodies, and in their composition and procedures. It would seem to be more important that the organization fit the general pattern of administrative structure of a country than that the authorities in various countries be similar. There may, however, be some suggestions that are applicable to all.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS ON PROBLEMS OF DOMESTIC STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

The following recommendations relative to problems raised in section II are based on (1) the collective experience of the Group, (2) the comments on the draft programme forwarded by Governments to the Secretary-General, and (3) geographic and linguistic analyses of the problems.

The Group accepts the fact that while these recommendations are felt to be sound it is probable that some at least can usefully be refined as more countries contribute to fuller understanding of the problems. The discussions have emphasized that no one country by itself can readily expect to comprehend fully all the toponymic phenomena that occur within its borders without comparison with the same sets of phenomena elsewhere. The Group feels it useful to emphasize that international standardization must be a partnership enterprise over a considerable period. Much more will probably depend upon the quality of the technical personnel employed by the various countries than on the size of the countries. To the extent also that countries can encourage young workers in this field the long-term

solution will be more satisfactory; because in the final analysis the detailed work can only be done by persons who are nationals of, and know the country concerned.

The Group wishes to make clear that it is recognized that the applicability of some of the recommendations of the report will be quite different in different countries. Some recommendations pertinent to countries where large numbers of names are yet unwritten would not be applicable in countries where this is not true. Other recommendations pertinent to countries where many names, though written, are not fixed in a single form would not apply in countries where the written forms are largely fixed. It is recognized that the problem of the initial establishment of a written geographical nomenclature may be quite different from the problems of refining a nomenclature. Many of the recommendations, however, are believed to be widely, if not universally, applicable.

Recommendation I

As an initial step in international standardization, countries that have not begun to exercise their prerogative of standardizing their own names are urged to do so. This function should be carried out by a national names authority. The hierarchical place of such authority should be consonant with the governmental structure in each country. The composition and procedures of such a body should be such as to give the greatest chance of success in a name standardization programme appropriate for that country.

While the form, status, function and procedures of name standardizing bodies may vary considerably, in any case it is desirable that:

(1) The authority of the standardizing body should be clearly stated;

(2) The standardizing body should deal with name policy as well as with individual names;

(3) Provision be made for consideration of the effects of actions on government agencies, private organizations and other groups, and for reconciliation of their interests, as far as possible, with long-range interests of the country as a whole;

(4) Record keeping and publication procedures be such as to make standardized names available as promptly and widely as possible;

(5) Continuity of the standardizing body be provided for.

It is recommended that names authorities publish standardized names in gazetteer form as well as on maps since much information necessary for the proper understanding and interpretation of names cannot be included readily on maps.

The methods of determining the actual name and its correct writing should be adapted in each country to the combination of name problems requiring solution and the volume of names that the country proposes to standardize.

It is recommended that for each name which is to be standardized there should be as complete a research as possible to provide information on the following points:

1. Spelling on old maps;
2. Spelling on existing modern maps;
3. Spelling in cadastral documents and in land registers;
4. Written and spoken form of the name, and its meaning, according to the local inhabitants.

For point 4 it will be useful to provide for the recording of the name in a precise phonetic notation or, if possible, on tape.

It is recommended that the character and extent of the feature named should be determined as accurately as possible.

The personnel employed in the initial processes of assembling information on names should have training adequate to recognize and deal with the linguistic and geographic phenomena that they are likely to encounter. (a, v)⁴

It is important to take into account the problem presented by cartography (that is, the existence of maps already in use and the constant production of new maps for a multitude of purposes), but a proper treatment of names requires a specialized knowledge. There must be a close liaison between national cartographic agencies and national names authorities in their parallel programmes.

Recommendation II

Actions by national names authorities will be more readily agreed upon, more easily accepted, and less subject to change if they are based on broad general principles clearly stated and made widely known. These may be either generalizations about toponymic phenomena or statements of courses of action, or both. The principles could usefully relate to the relative weight to be given different sources of names or written forms, or to different kinds of usage, such as local spoken usage, usage in current published books, maps or current official records, or usage in published historical material. It will facilitate determination of the actual name when usage differs, and promote objectiveness in making determinations of this and other kinds if principal reliance can be placed upon principles.

If it is agreed that the most important result of geographic name standardization is the efficiency with which the names identify and facilitate reference to individual geographic entities, it will be easier to formulate pertinent principles and to make decisions wisely on many matters such as retention of existing names versus replacement by new ones. Furthermore, the fact that actions are taken on this basis will go far towards wide acceptance of them. National names authorities will find it useful to formulate such general principles as early as possible, to re-examine and refine them from time to time in the light of observed effects of applying them, and to add new ones as new knowledge is acquired.

⁴ Letters in parentheses at the end of a recommendation refer to the corresponding statement of problems in section II.

If frequent exceptions have to be made, it will probably be useful to restate the principles. However, much of the value of a guiding principle comes from following it as uniformly and for as long a time as possible. The principles should, therefore, be as sound as possible in the beginning. It will contribute to such soundness if principles reflect, or are based upon, observed or deduced habits and attitudes of the people towards geographic names, and upon analyses of toponymic phenomena.

In countries where most names have written forms established in usage, the principles will probably be derived in considerable part from study of the written forms. Such study of written forms as has been done in other countries should be placed at the disposal of the national names authority, since it is possible that studies of names by persons in other countries may draw attention to, or suggest solutions for, problems that may have been regarded as sources of inconvenience but not as capable of solution.

In countries where many have no written forms, or none that are fixed, the first statements of principles will perhaps be limited to those relating to the recording and editing processes, or to the rendition of such names in terms of a national or principal language. (a, c, h)

Recommendation III

In any country where considerable numbers of names are yet to be standardized in their written forms, careful consideration should be given to the advantages of systematic treatment in producing standard forms more cheaply, quickly and uniformly. Since retention of certain well established names will be preferred in many instances, the national names authority should formulate general principles governing such exceptions to systematic treatment. This may clarify the extent to which systematic treatment is applicable. Systematic treatment should not operate to suppress significant elements in the names treated. Nor should standardization be based on translation unless that translation is in local use. (k)

Recommendation IV

A national names authority should take cognizance of confusion arising from use of the same name for several entities of the same kind, and take appropriate measures to reduce duplication that now causes confusion or is likely to do so. Such measures might take the form of replacement of some of the duplicated names by others acceptable locally, or the addition of something to some of the duplicated names to make them different.

Formulation of a statement of the degree of duplication that is considered tolerable may shed light on the problem and assist in its solution. (j)

Recommendation V

Many names may already have been fixed by law but it is likely that even in this field, the process of assigning new names or of changing existing names should provide for consultation with the national names authority

as well as for a report by the national names authority on the probable consequences of the proposed new naming or change. (*a, c, e, h, v*)

Recommendation VI

When it is considered advisable by the name-standardizing authority (1) to approve for standard use a name or spelling that differs from that in local usage, or (2) to select standard names or spellings from among alternatives, the general public or those most affected should be consulted, or informed of such intention in advance, and given an opportunity to comment. This will increase acceptability and decrease likelihood of error. (*n*)

Recommendation VII

It is recommended that if they have not already done so, countries of complicated ethnic and linguistic constitution consider and attempt to solve the problems brought about by the existence within their boundaries of names from unwritten languages, or from minority languages (written or unwritten) or from dialects of the principal languages. Since the solution of these problems may be exceedingly difficult it is suggested that such countries can work together with, and profit from, the experience of other nations with similar problems to bring about solutions satisfactory for their own needs.

It may be useful for countries to distinguish between minority languages spoken by people living *en bloc* and those spoken by people dispersed among speakers of the principal language.

For the treatment of names from unwritten languages two stages are necessary. First, for recording names from oral evidence, one can develop an unambiguous phonemic notation for each language applying to that language alone. Alternatively, where there is in use a phonetic alphabet adaptable to a number of unwritten languages, for example the International African Alphabet, it may be advantageous to apply it. Second, one can write the names in final form by means of regular correspondence established between that phonemic notation or phonetic alphabet and the writing system of the principal language of the country concerned.

If a minority language is written in the same writing system as the principal language with minor modifications, it is recommended that the modifications be retained in standardizing the minority language names.

If a minority language is written in a writing system different from that of the principal language, it is recommended that the names be rendered systematically from the minority language by transliteration or transcription as appropriate. (*e*)

Recommendation VIII

In standardizing the names of physical features, national names authorities should take cognizance of the problem of establishing exactly to what feature a name applies, and what are its limits. Local usage is generally the most satisfactory source of such information, but

where local usage is vague, or where the feature is so large that it is not recognized in local usage, the national names authority may usefully establish its limits for purposes of uniform reference.

As need arises for names for parts of features that are named in their entirety, there may be advantages in a systematic treatment following either a wide-spread national practice of naming such parts of features, or regional practices. If systematic treatment is adopted as a general principle, this should be clearly stated, together with circumstances in which exceptions may be made.

The fewer the changes in proposed new names that must be made by a national names authority, to bring them into accord with principles, the better.

If there are large natural features such as rivers for which there are now only local names for parts of the feature, it may be well to anticipate the need for a name for the entire feature and provide one; otherwise different names or forms may arise almost simultaneously when the need arises.

It is recommended that in national gazetteers the names of parts of natural features be additionally defined by reference to the whole, and that the names of extended features be defined as necessary by reference to their constituent parts. (*b, d*)

Recommendation IX

It is recommended that in standardizing collective names (such as those referring to an agglomeration of inhabited places), the national gazetteer should specify, where appropriate, the names of the entities to which a collective name refers.

Names of administrative divisions are often collective names in this sense and it is recommended that national gazetteers should be supplemented by a complete list of administrative divisions and subdivisions and their constituent entities; provision should be made for the issue of revised lists as the administrative structure of the country changes. (*p*)

Recommendation X

It is recommended that in countries where many names have optional parts any uncertainty as to what is optional should be removed. This can be done for legal and administrative names by statement of both the full name with generic term and short name without generic term.

It is recommended, in the interest of uniformity and simplicity, that names without optional parts should be used whenever possible, that optional parts should not be added to existing names, and that the national names authority should state when the optional parts of existing names that are retained should or should not be used. (*g*)

Recommendation XI

It is recommended that national names authorities distinguish clearly between a generic term that forms

part of a name and a word that may be used to tell the kind of feature it is, but is not part of the name; otherwise there may be confusion as to whether the designating word should be included in the standard name.

It is recommended that the standardizing procedure should not operate to suppress generic terms that are used locally or regionally, though more widely used terms may be used (in addition to and not as a part of the name) to indicate the nature of the feature. (q.1)

Recommendation XII

Studies should be made of the nature of named entities in any country, and of the varied meaning of words used to designate them since they will probably bring to light unexpected facts relevant to getting and conveying to others an understanding of the entities named, and indicate the inadequacy of ordinary dictionaries in this branch of knowledge. (p)

Recommendation XIII

It is recommended that national gazetteers should include a glossary of the generic terms occurring in the names standardized, particularly for those terms that have special or local significance. (p, q.1)

Recommendation XIV

In the interest of both national and international standardization, in countries where some names occur in parallel syntactical or grammatical forms, the national names authority should consider making one of these forms the standard name, either according to a general rule or name by name. (f)

Recommendation XV

It is recommended that in all countries, in whose languages the definite article can enter into geographic 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. (r)

Recommendation XVI

It is recommended that all countries set up standards for the use of abbreviations of elements in their geographic names. Such standards should take into consideration the structure of the language or languages concerned so that unambiguous interpretation of abbreviations will be possible. For some languages quite simple standards will suffice such as the requirement that a given abbreviation stand for one and only one word. For other languages, it may be necessary in abbreviations to differentiate inflections such as gender, case and number or to distinguish between cardinal and ordinal numerals. (q.2)

Recommendation XVII

It is recommended that in countries with place names whose printing form either does not agree with that of the language as a whole or varies from name to name without apparent reason, the national names authority should consider the advantages of making the printing form for geographic names consistent. This recommendation would not apply to printing form differences that have grammatical or semantic significance in the language. (l)

Recommendation XVIII

It is recommended that all countries set up standards for expressing the location of geographic entities within their boundaries to a degree of precision commensurate with unambiguous identification, whether location be stated in terms of geographic co-ordination, by reference to other established points, or both. (o)

Recommendation XIX

It is recommended that names authorities include in gazetteers such information on geographic names as gender, number, definite and indefinite forms, position of stress, tone and pronunciation where such information will make the names more readily understood and usable nationally and internationally. (u)

Recommendation XX

It is recommended that Arabic-alphabet countries regularly provide complete documentation for all geographical names, including the provision of all vowels and the notation of unvowelled and doubled consonants, for example, vowel points, tashdids, hamzahs and sukūns in Arabic.

It is also in point that since modern practice has come to require the rendition of Arabic, Persian and other Arabic alphabet names in terms of standard language forms, such documentation is a prerequisite to international use of nationally standardized forms.

For such languages as Siamese and Amharic where the existence or absence of certain vowels and the doubling of consonants are not indicated in the writing system used, the names standardizing authority should provide phonetic or other notation in respect of these points, so that there may be uniformity of transliteration and transcription at the international standardization stage. (s)

Recommendation XXI

It is recommended that the names authorities of all countries that use an ideographic writing system for which there is an alternate or auxiliary alphabet or syllabic script, provide as far as possible the alphabetic or syllabic writing for each geographic name. (t)

IV. QUESTION OF CALLING AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE AND SPONSORING OF WORKING GROUPS

The Group considered the matter of the desirability of holding an international conference on the subject of standardization of geographical names and of the sponsor-

ing of working groups based on common linguistic systems. In making the study, account has been taken of the views expressed by Governments in reply to the Secretary-General's inquiry, and of the work achieved by international scientific organizations. In view of the fact that implementation by national bodies of standard methods for dealing with geographical names requires the agreement and support of the countries concerned, the Group was unanimous in its concurrence that it is imperative to hold an international conference to study national and international problems involved, to exchange technical information and to reach agreement on concrete steps to be taken.

Moreover, it has also become apparent in recent years that the toponymic problems of one country commonly recur in other countries. This suggests that each country has something to gain from comparison of such problems and of the efficacy of efforts to solve them, since the experience of each country is relevant to comparable problems in other countries. Such experience means individual efforts as well as collective efforts by groups of Governments. A sharing of this experience and a comparison of problems would be highly profitable.

The profit that arises from the sharing of experience has been amply demonstrated at the meeting. All of the experts were agreed that each had learned much from elaboration of the problems by the others and the joint evaluation of alternative methods of dealing with them.

In the opinion of the Group such a conference will have the greatest chance of success after the following conditions are fulfilled:

(a) Interest has been shown by a great number of countries in this undertaking and ground work on domestic standardization has been solidly laid;

(b) Thorough preparation is made with regard to the

arrangements for the conference, including a clear outlining of the technical problems involved.

With regard to (a), one way to ascertain the degree of interest of countries would be to survey, through reports by Governments to the Economic and Social Council, within two years, the implementation of the technical recommendations of the Group stated in the previous chapter. Such reports should include a statement on what has already been done with regard to domestic standardization and on what remains to be accomplished, including reference to special problems encountered and technical assistance required.

With respect to (b), it is believed that in view of the complexity of the various problems of national and international character involving different linguistic systems, it would be useful to have a small advisory group composed of linguists, geographers, cartographers and other principal users of geographical names to assist the Secretariat in the preparation of such a conference if it is called. The primary task of this advisory group would include the following: Preparation of the technical agenda for the conference, taking into account the reports received from Governments referred to above and the work achieved by international scientific organizations pertinent to this problem. The services of this advisory group could also be made available to regional meetings or seminars, grouping countries of the same language or the same writing system, initiated by the countries concerned.

In the interest of promotion of international uniformity in the writing of geographical names and of elimination of confusion harmful to an orderly national and international standardization, it is highly desirable that the interested Governments could apply individually or collectively to the United Nations for advice and assistance in solving specific problems.

Annex I

List of selected technical terms

1. Geographical name	A proper name, consisting of one or more words, used to designate an individual geographic entity
2. Toponym	The name of a natural feature
3. Place name	The name of a populated place
4. Feature name	The name of a natural feature
5. Geographic entity	A comprehensive expression referring to any object or place which has a geographic name
6. Natural feature (or physical feature)	Any natural entity which may have a geographic name
7. Hydrographic feature	Any body of water, including flowing water on land
8. Cultural feature	Anything made or significantly modified by man, including a road, railway, bridge and the like
9. Populated place	Any inhabited place
10. Generic term	The noun element of a geographic name indicating the type of entity
11. Specific term	The element of a geographic name identifying the individual entity
12. Map information	Words on a map which do not constitute a geographic name but which indicate the presence of something or a characteristic of the area
13. Transliteration	The letter-for-letter transfer of a name from one alphabet to another alphabet

14. Transcription	The transfer of a name from one language to another on the basis of pronunciation; usually, but not necessarily, connotes transfer involving a non-alphabetic language. Not used in the lay sense of "copying"
15. Official language	Any language recognized at the national level which may be used in the legislature and the courts. Some countries recognize more than one language as official. A language that has some official sanction in part of the country, but not nationally, would not normally be considered an "official language"
16. National language	The dominant language, pervading all or most of a country
17. Principal language	The language most used within a country; if more or less evenly divided, there might be more than one principal language, for example, French and Flemish in Belgium
18. Minority language (or minor language)	Any language not used by a significantly large part of the country's population
19. Dialect	A local form of a language
20. Patois	A variant form of a language, less wide-spread than a dialect
21. Writing system	Any systematic method of writing
22. Syllabic writing system	A writing system using phonetic characters corresponding to syllables, for example, <i>kana</i> in Japanese
23. Phoneme	The minimum unit of significant sound in the structure of a language; a distinctive sound or range of sounds interpreted by speakers of the language as one sound, and having a greater or lesser number of allophones
24. Diacritical mark	Any mark added above, below or inside a letter as ordinarily written, including tone marks where appropriate
25. Modified letter	Examples, Icelandic <i>ð</i> , Danish <i>ø</i> , Polish <i>ł</i> and the ligatured letter <i>æ</i>
26. Vowel point	A mark placed above, below, or inside a letter to indicate a vowel, as in Arabic or Hebrew. Whereas diacritical marks modify an existing letter, vowel points denote a sound which commonly is not written
27. Domestic standardization	The process whereby the authorized agency fixes a name or names in its own country on behalf of the users thereof, whether such use becomes compulsory or not
28. Alternate name	One of two or more names for the same thing
29. Variant name	A name other than that (or those) standardized or approved
30. Conventional name	A name used widely or over a long period which warrants retention even though not otherwise approved, for example, "Vienna" for "Wien"
31. National names authority	A body having authority and instructions to standardize names within a country
32. Official publication	Any map, list, guide or the like having official status but not necessarily representing official standardization of names or spellings
33. Printing form	The manner in which the letters are put together as regards, for example, capitalization, spelling or hyphenation
34. Designation	A common noun indicating the type of thing named. A geographic name does not always contain a generic term, and when it does the generic term does not always make clear the nature of the thing named
35. Co-ordinates	Geographical co-ordinates
36. Gazetteer	A list of geographic names identifying the nature and location of the thing named. Most lists of names issued by standardizing bodies are gazetteers
37. Geographical dictionary	A compilation of geographic names that provides the identifying and locating information included in gazetteers and such additional geographic information as population, area, resources and the like
38. Name index	Usually a list of names in a publication, indicating the place in that publication where the name in question appears
39. Dictionary	A collection of words giving all the definitions of each word that are known to the compiler
40. Glossary	Usually confined to a group of words on a specialized subject; more likely than a dictionary to specify the meaning which should properly be attributed to a word
41. Vocabulary	The stock of words of an individual or a group

Annex II

List of national authorities dealing with geographical names ^a

<p style="text-align: center;">AUSTRALIA</p> <p>Division of National Mapping,^b Department of National Development Acton, Canberra, A.C.T.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">BELGIUM</p> <p>Commission sur la toponymie, Ministère de l'instruction publique, Brussels</p> <p style="text-align: center;">BRAZIL</p> <p>Conselho Nacional de Geografia, Gabinete Do Secretario-Geral, Rio de Janeiro</p> <p style="text-align: center;">CANADA</p> <p>Canadian Board on Geographical Names, Department of Mines and Resources, Ottawa, Ontario</p> <p style="text-align: center;">CHILE</p> <p>Instituto Geográfico Militar, Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, Santiago</p> <p style="text-align: center;">CHINA</p> <p>Geographic Section, Department of Lands, Ministry of the Interior, Taipei, Taiwan</p> <p style="text-align: center;">DENMARK</p> <p>Stednavneudvalget, Fiolsteede 1, Copenhagen</p> <p style="text-align: center;">for GREENLAND</p> <p>Det Grønlandske Stednavneudvalg, Ministeriat for Grønland, Hausegade 3, Copenhagen K</p> <p style="text-align: center;">FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY</p> <p>Ständiger Ausschuss für die deutsche Rechtschreibung geographischer Namen, c/o Bundesanstalt für Landeskunde und Raumforschung, Ministerium des Innern, Bad Godesberg</p> <p style="text-align: center;">FEDERATION OF RHODESIA AND NYASALAND</p> <p>Geographical Place Names Committee (for Northern Rhodesia), Office of the Surveyor-General in Lusaka, PO Box 442, Lusaka</p> <p>Standing Committee on Geographic Names (for Southern Rhodesia), Causeway P.O. 8,099, Salisbury</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">FRANCE</p> <p>Commission de toponymie, Institut géographique national, 2 Avenue Pasteur, Saint-Mandé (Seine)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">GREECE</p> <p>Council on the Names of Greek Places, Ministry of the Interior, Athens</p> <p style="text-align: center;">GUATEMALA</p> <p>Instituto Geográfico Nacional, Dirección General de Cartografía, Avenida Las Américas 3-76, Guatemala</p> <p style="text-align: center;">INDIA</p> <p>Advisory Board for National Atlas and Geographical Names, Ministry of Scientific Research and Culture Affairs, New Delhi</p> <p style="text-align: center;">INDONESIA</p> <p>Komisi Istilah Ilmu Bumi, Djakarta</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ISRAEL</p> <p>Government Names Committee, Geographic Names Commission, Office of the Prime Minister, Keren Kayemet Street, Jerusalem</p> <p style="text-align: center;">KOREA (Republic of)</p> <p>Place Names Standardization Committee, Central Geographic Institute, Republic of Korea Defense Department, Seoul</p> <p style="text-align: center;">LIBERIA</p> <p>Board of Geographical Names, Monrovia</p> <p style="text-align: center;">MOZAMBIQUE</p> <p>Comissão Consultativa de Toponímia, Arquivo Nacional, Praça 7 de Marco esq. Major Arsujo, Lourenço Marques</p> <p style="text-align: center;">NEW ZEALAND</p> <p>New Zealand Geographic Board, Department of Lands and Survey, Wellington, C.1</p> <p style="text-align: center;">NORWAY</p> <p>Norsk Stadnaumnarkiv, Drammasvegen 42-B, Oslo</p> <p style="text-align: center;">POLAND</p> <p>Polska Komisja Ustalania Nazw Geograficznych, c/o Instytut Geografii, Polska Akademia Nauk (Polish Academy of Sciences), Krakowskie Przedmiescie 30, Warszawa</p>
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^a Based on information available at the United States Board on Geographical Names and brought up to date by the Cartographic Section of the United Nations Secretariat.

^b The Division of National Mapping is responsible for coordinating the standardizing activities of the individual states.

SOUTH AFRICA

Place Names Committee, Republic of South Africa,
Department of Education, Arts and Sciences,
Van der Stel Building,
Pretorius Street,
Pretoria

SPAIN

Comisión de Toponimia,
Consejo Superior Geográfico,
Nicasio Gallego 21,
Madrid

SWEDEN

Ortnamnskommissionen,
Svenska Ortnamnsarkivet Kungl,
Uppsala

**UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND**

Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for British Official
Use,

c/o Royal Geographical Society,
1 Kensington Gore,
London, S.W.7

for the ANTARCTIC

Antarctic Place Names Committee,
Research Department of the Foreign Office,
London

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Board on Geographic Names,
Department of the Interior,
Washington 25, D.C.

UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS

Postoyannaya Komissiya po Voprosam Transkriptaii,
Glavnoye Upravleniye Geodezii, Kartografii i Aerofotos'emki,
Moskva 66

VENEZUELA

Instituto Geográfico Nacional,
Caracas