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UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE STANDARDIZATION
OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE SECOND MEETING

held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 5 September 1967, at 10.20 a.m.

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| <u>President:</u> | Mr. BURRILL | United States of America |
| <u>Rapporteur:</u> | Mr. GOMEZ de SILVA | Mexico |
| <u>Executive Secretary:</u> | Mr. URETA | |

CONTENTS:

Election of officers (agenda item 3) (continued)

Reports by Governments on the progress made in the standardization
of geographical names (agenda item 7)

N.B. Participants wishing to have corrections to this provisional summary record incorporated in the final summary record of the meeting are requested to submit them in writing, preferably on a copy of the record itself, to the Secretariat, Room D.509, Palais des Nations, Geneva, within two working days of receiving the provisional record in their working language.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS (agenda item 3) (continued)

Mr. KHAMASUNDARA (Thailand) nominated Mr. Lambert (Australia) for the office of Chairman of Committee No. 1 on National Standardization Programmes.

Mr. GLEDITCH (Norway) seconded the nomination.

Mr. Lambert (Australia) was elected Chairman of Committee No. 1 by acclamation.

Mr. MARTY (Cameroon) nominated Mr. Gall (Guatemala) for the office of Chairman of Committee No. 2 on Geographical Terms.

Mr. DROLET (Canada) seconded the nomination.

Mr. Gall (Guatemala) was elected Chairman of Committee No. 2 by acclamation.

Mr. SPIESS (Switzerland) nominated Mr. Lewis (United Kingdom) for the office of Chairman of Committee No. 3 on Writing Systems.

Mr. SUNTHAN (Cambodia) seconded the nomination.

Mr. Lewis (United Kingdom) was elected Chairman of Committee No. 3 by acclamation.

Mr. AMER (United Arab Republic) nominated Mr. Buru (Libya) for the office of Chairman of Committee No. 4 on International Co-operation.

Mr. BURU (Libya) observed that it would be difficult for him, as the sole representative of his country, to serve as Chairman of a Committee. He nominated Mr. Ayoubi (Lebanon).

Mr. LINDQVIST (Sweden) nominated Mr. Fraser (Canada).

Mr. MAHIAR-NAVABI (Iran) seconded the nomination of Mr. Fraser.

Mr. ORMELING (Netherlands) nominated Mr. Spiess (Switzerland)

Mr. SPIESS (Switzerland) stated that, to his regret, he could not accept candidature because acceptance of the office of Chairman would be contrary to his country's policy in international organizations.

The PRESIDENT noted that only one nomination had been seconded. If there were no objections, he would take it that Mr. Fraser (Canada) had been elected Chairman of Committee No. 4.

It was so decided.

REPORTS OF GOVERNMENTS ON THE PROGRESS MADE IN THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES (agenda item 7) (E/CONF.53/L.3, L.6, L.9, L.12, L.13, L.17, L.21, L.22, L.23, L.25, L.35, L.42, L.44, L.46, L.48)

The PRESIDENT invited delegations to report on the progress made by their countries in the standardization of geographical names.

Mr. LAMBERT (Australia) said that a full report on his country's activities appeared in document E/CONF.53/L.23. In recent years the activities of the United Nations had given impetus to action by the Australian State Governments which, with the Territory Administrations, were responsible for place names. Some co-ordination of national efforts had been affected by the National Mapping Council of Australia on which all the Governments and Administrations were represented. Gazetteers were being prepared; the annexures to the report showed the principles of organization applied and the addresses of the various authorities responsible for the work in progress.

One particular problem encountered had been that of unwritten names, which had been used in the past without any definite system. Efforts were being made to rectify that state of affairs. In New Guinea, for instance an attempt was being made to preserve for posterity the names used by the indigenous population.

Mr. BREU (Austria) said that his Government's report appeared in document E/CONF.53/L.12. Austria had to deal with two types of geographical names: those of inhabited places, and others. Names in the first category were fixed either by provincial government law or by communal decree. Every ten years, the names were printed in the official gazetteer published by the Statistical Central Office. Names in the second category were fixed by the Survey Group of the Federal Office of Gauging and Surveying, which was free to make its own decisions and was guided only by local tradition.

The most important achievement of the past five years had been the publication, by the Federal Bureau of Gauging and Surveying, of a 1:50,000 map, in which the names conformed exactly to those officially published by the Statistical Office. A problem still to be solved was that of fixing the names of fields, meadows, mountains, rivers and other features encountered during field work by the surveying staff. The

Federal Bureau urgently needed the help of toponymic committees to produce uniform and scientifically correct work. Only one such committee existed, so far, in Vorarlberg, but others were to be set up in due course.

Mr. MARTY (Cameroon) said that, as would be seen from document E/CONF.53/L.22, several organizations in Cameroon published catalogues of names for different purposes but only the Geographical Service dealt with the whole problem, and it was not officially responsible for the standardization of geographical names. There was therefore no official spelling of names except for those of the principal administrative centres in the regions and districts, the spelling of which had become official by long usage. In East Cameroon where the official language was French, the principles applied in transcribing names were those fixed by the French National Geographical Institute for use in the African countries for which the Institute made maps. In West Cameroon, the principles applied were similar to those of the East, but English rules of spelling and pronunciation were respected, since English was the official language. It was hoped that agreement could be reached in the future on a transcription principle for the whole Federation and that an organization could be established to standardize geographical names, so that an official spelling might be adopted for the greatest possible number of names.

Mr. DROLET (Canada) said that the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names had replaced the Canadian Geographical Commission which had been founded in 1897.

The heritage of Canada's two founder nations - France and Great Britain - was reflected in its toponymy. In addition, many names were derived from the indigenous languages - Indian and Eskimo - and others from the languages of the numerous immigrants.

The federal system of government, consisting of a central national Government and ten Provincial Governments, had influenced the approach to toponymy over the past seventy years. While the need for a centralizing authority was recognized, the Provinces were severally responsible for names falling within their own boundaries; that arrangement was essential in a vast country of such varied physiography and historical development.

At the turn of the century, the need to standardize geographical names in a young nation which was developing administratively and geographically had prompted the preparation of practical rules of nomenclature. A national gazetteer had been produced; it was divided into Provinces, and provided an up-to-date register of all geographical names for the convenience of the official or public user. Current decisions on names were disseminated to the producers of maps and charts, and to agencies responsible for communications and other services, which required up-to-date information. Field investigations, based mainly on local interviews but drawing on all available documentary sources of information, had demonstrated their effectiveness in clarifying local nomenclature.

While its experience on those matters might be of interest to other countries, Canada hoped to learn more at the Conference about modern techniques of name standardization such as methods of using computers.

He expressed his country's interest in the formation of a United Nations permanent commission as suggested by the Group of Experts (E/Conf.53/L.1, para.13), the continued exchange of information following the Conference; and the suggested post-Conference regional meetings, (ibid, para.9).

Mr. SUN Tang-yueh (China) said that the Chinese language differed from other languages in being composed of characters from three different sources - descriptive, phonetic and ideographic. Although there were many and varied dialects in the vast territory of China, the writing system was uniform and, in standardizing geographical names, emphasis was laid on correct pronunciation. The publication in 1928 of a national system of phonetic letters, which was taught from the primary school onwards, had further encouraged the use of the uniform writing system.

His country welcomed the work done by the Group of Experts on the standardization of geographical names and was willing to accept any reasonable recommendations the Group might make.

The Chinese Ministry of the Interior had set up its own group of experts to study the question. That Group had already held several meetings and, among other recommendations, had stressed the importance of writing national geographical names accurately, of defining E/CONF.53/SR.2

the boundaries of geographical features, of agreeing on a uniform method of writing names drawn from spoken dialects, and of abbreviating the existing geographical names. The last two activities had already begun; a 1:1,000,000 scale map had been published giving all the principal Chinese names, and many geographical names consisting of three characters had been reduced to two; however, much work remained to be done in the latter field. An attempt was being made to standardize the writing and pronunciation of existing geographical names, and the United States Government had recently been requested to assist with their transliteration.

Recent publications included a book on modified readings for Chinese place names, based on the experience gained in standardization, and a national dictionary giving explanations and background information on the historical and other meanings of such names.

Although the Chinese Government placed great emphasis on the uniformity of geographical names, no authorized agency or permanent organization was responsible for securing such uniformity. His Government would be very grateful for any assistance which could be provided by the United Nations in setting up a permanent organization to take sole responsibility for that work at the national level.

Mr. CHRISTODOULOU (Cyprus) said that his country had made a start on the standardization of geographical names by setting up a group of experts to apply the decisions of the Conference.

Mr. ANDERSEN (Denmark) said that a place-names committee had been set up in 1910, composed of representatives of the Danish Government and administration, map-producing agencies, the Geodetic Institute, the Hydrographic Office, the University, and specialists in Nordic philology and history. Some 30,000 place names had now been published for twenty administrative districts, leaving only one district for which the printing of names had not yet been completed. The list for the Faroe Islands was prepared in two languages - Danish and Faroese - but generally the Faroese names were used. A special committee had been set up for Greenland, which would work on the principles already applied to the Faroes, but mapping would take some years. The Scandinavian countries were co-operating in the matter and hoped to submit a joint report at a later stage.

Mr. ASSAYE (Ethiopia) said that the Imperial Ethiopian Mapping and Geographical Institute was continuing to collect and standardize place names, using Amharic, the national language. The language was a phonetic one with an alphabet of about 231 letters, including 33 consonants with 7 vowel forms for each consonant. The simplified system used for transliterating the alphabet into English had been described at the United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference held at Nairobi in 1963 and had been published in the report of that Conference. Field parties were collecting and transliterating names according to that system. A start had been made on compiling glossaries of geographical terms and on standardizing names in a number of administrative areas and sub-regions. It was hoped that a gazetteer and glossary could be published in the near future. A committee set up within the Mapping and Geographical Institute was working on the question of standardization at the national level; the information acquired at the present Conference would be extremely useful to that committee.

Mr. MEYNEN (Federal Republic of Germany) said that his Government's report appeared in document E/CONF.53/L.9. The spelling of place names was a matter for official decision by the Länder. The names of geographical entities had not, as a rule, been the subject of official decisions, but their inclusion in official maps gave them a certain official character.

The Permanent Committee on Geographical Names, set up in 1959, was responsible for co-ordinating and promulgating the rules for domestic standardization of names and for publishing results. In 1966 it had published the first volume of the official Duden gazetteer, which gave the correct official spellings recommended for domestic use.

Mr. NISSILA (Finland) said that close and regular co-operation was maintained between cartographers and toponymists in his country. The National Board of Survey was responsible for the preparation of Finnish maps, including the field collection of names, the selection of names for the maps, and - since Finland was bilingual - their submission for revision, before printing, to the Finnish Name Archives or the Swedish Society for Literature in Finland. Names were corrected and checked against collections of geographical names, maps and other information available in the Name Archives and guidebooks.

The field collection and office treatment of place names from all over Finland were comprehensive tasks involving most of the problems mentioned in the report of the Group of Experts on Geographical Names. A total of 700,000 names had already been collected for the compilation of basic maps on the scale of 1:20,000. The compilation should be completed in the early 1970's and would include more than 1 million names; it would form the basis for the names on smaller-scale maps.

Particular attention had been paid to the standardization of geographical names in a new 1:1 million scale map now being prepared. The main purpose of the new map was to show the location of the most important place names in Finland, which totalled some 8,000. Maps of that type would undoubtedly be of assistance to cartographic agencies in other countries in constructing their maps of Finland.

The PRESIDENT read out two Press comments that had been brought to his attention. He suggested that representatives should hand any interesting Press comments to the Secretariat, since the Press was a useful medium for educating the public to use standardized geographical names.

Mr. NEDELEC (France) said that, although France had long been studying the problems involved in standardizing geographical names his Government had not submitted a comprehensive report on its activities in recent years. It had, however, communicated with the Secretariat on individual items of the agenda, in particular item 9, sub-items (b), (c), (d) and (f).

Mr. GALL (Guatemala) said that the National Geographical Institute of Guatemala had started work on standardizing geographical names in May 1956. In 1958 work had begun on the Geographical Dictionary. To put an end to confusion in geographical terms a presidential Decree had been issued in 1959 to the effect that only those names appearing in the records of the Geographical Institute should be considered official names.

Following the adoption of the recommendations of the Group of Experts on Geographical Names in July 1960, a Mixed Commission on Geographical Names had been set up in Guatemala. The Geographical Dictionary of Guatemala, published in two volumes in 1960 and 1961, contained the geographical names standardized up to the time of its publication. The standardized names also appeared on the 1:1 million and larger-scale maps.

In 1965 the National Geographical Institute had published his paper entitled "Contribución a los nombres geográficos de Guatemala", which comprised a philological study of the region, the rules guiding the Mixed Commission on Geographical Names, and examples of resolutions on standardization.

The Supplement to the Geographical Dictionary, covering the years 1961 to 1964, had been completed in 1965 and was now being printed in two volumes of over 400 pages each. It contained several hundred new geographical names, cross-references to historical names no longer in use, and new terms and definitions. His delegation wished to express its appreciation to the National Printing House and its director, Mr. Carlos Rodas Cruz, for publishing 2,500 copies of the Supplement free of charge. Work on the next Supplement, covering the years 1964-1967 and based on 1964 census data, was under way and more than 8,700 names were ready for immediate reference.

Several Central American countries had asked for help regarding methods and specifications for use in preparing their own geographical dictionaries. An official of the National Geographical Institute had visited El Salvador and Honduras in 1966 and Costa Rica in 1967, and those countries were now preparing their geographical dictionaries in the light of Guatemala's experience.

Mr. POLSPOEL (Holy See) said that, although the Holy See could not take an active part in the standardization of geographical names, it was following progress with interest. The existing centre for the study of religious topography had recently been given official recognition by the International Geographical Union.

Mr. MAHIAR-NAVABI (Iran) referred to the new measures being taken in his country, in particular the establishment of committees under the Ministry of the Interior, the Geographical Department at Army Headquarters, and the Geographical Institute of the University of Tehran. Three lists of names had already been published by Government bodies and would shortly be revised. A climatological map and atlas were in course of preparation by the Army Geographical Department and the Geographical Institute.

In the process of standardization, attention was being paid to historical documents as well as to geographical names and terminology. In Iran, which was one of the oldest countries in the world and therefore rich in historical material, the standardization of geographical names was of particular importance. In that connexion he had noted that the documents before the Committee contained frequent references to "interested countries" and "uninterested countries". The fact was that the standardization of geographical names would not be achieved until every State realized its importance, and national activity must be encouraged and accelerated by international organizations, in particular the United Nations.

Mr. ALON (Israel) said that a report on the progress made in his country appeared in document E/CONF.53/L.25. Israel was in a comparatively satisfactory situation because it had, in the Bible, an authoritative source for almost all names that were well-known nationally and internationally. The task was simply to locate and identify on the map the names of settlements which had existed in biblical times, and to assign those names to present-day settlements and towns.

The task of reviving biblical names and, in a few cases, of finding Hebrew names had been entrusted to a Names Committee which had achieved considerable progress since its appointment by the Government in 1951. It had compiled gazetteers for the 1:250,000 and 1:100,000 scale maps and had already started to fix names for the objects shown on the 1:20,000 scale maps.

The regulations of the Hebrew Academy were used for transcription. For non-Hebrew names the regulations inherited from the period of the Mandate were used, except in the case of some well-known biblical names, for which different transcriptions were used according to national Bibles.

Mr. LOXTON (Kenya) said that basic mapping and the collection of geographical names had been in progress in Kenya for some twenty years; a basic map on the scale of 1:50,000, covering the whole country, was nearly completed. Some 27,000 names had been collected, and the process of collection would continue as the maps were revised. A few thousand of the 27,000 names had been examined, and it was estimated that 80-90 per cent of the spellings used on existing maps would remain unchanged. The main problem, therefore, was how to deal with the names that were not spelt correctly. The longer they remained on the maps, the harder it would be to change them.

The main obstacle to further progress was a loss of confidence. The Standing Committee on Geographical Names had started with enthusiasm twenty years earlier, had introduced many new spellings, and had then found that people continued to use the old names. He favoured the arrangement described in the report submitted by New Zealand under agenda item 9 (E/CONF.53/L.7), according to which the spellings adopted by the Geographic Board became mandatory in due course; however, there might be legislative difficulties in introducing such an arrangement in some countries. He hoped that the Conference would adopt a strong resolution on the subject, which would help him to persuade his Government to institute at least some measure of compulsion.

Mr. AYOUBI (Lebanon) said that in his country the rules for transliterating Arabic into Latin characters had been applied to the basic 1:20,000 scale map since 1962, on the basis of the French language. The Department of Geographical Affairs was responsible for preparing the basic map and submitted it for correction to the Commission on Toponymy, of which he was Chairman. Exceptions had been made in the case of local names which had come into general use and which had been submitted to the Department of Geographical Affairs for approval, and in the case of historical names, which were included side by side with the current names.

All maps were now published in Latin characters and in French. They were based on the basic map and approved by the Department of Geographical Affairs.

Mr. MASSAQUOI (Liberia) said that, since his Government had established its first Board of Geographical Names in 1955, two gazetteers had been issued. The Board was now engaged, with United States aid, on a re-survey of the whole country in order to produce topographical and geological maps and a geophysical survey.

The first gazetteer had been based on a map scale of 1:1,000,000. Place names were derived from some twenty-eight different linguistic sources. His Government had encountered the same problem as that mentioned by the representative of Kenya in that the people continued to use traditional spellings, and efforts were being made to correct the spelling by providing schools with copies of the 1:100,000 scale map. The establishment of new political boundaries had made it necessary to deal with new names. The Government was currently employing field teams to re-check names, using the official English phonetic alphabet as a basis.

Mr. BURU (Libya) said that national standardization of geographical names was vital to his country because of the confusion which had arisen as a result of the writing of names in Arabic, English, French and Italian. The first step towards standardization had been taken during the Italian occupation of Libya. After the Second World War, the British had first followed the Italian system and then adopted a different system of writing Libyan place names. In 1962 a topographical map on the scale of 1:2,000,000 had been prepared by the United States Geological Survey; the geographical names on that map were based on the information available in that year and, in general, followed the transliteration system of the United States Board of Geographic Names and the United Kingdom Permanent Committee on Geographical Names. As a result of the current economic boom in Libya, little-known place names were appearing on maps, and it had become the practice to write them according to the local pronunciation. It was hoped that an official list of place names would soon be published by the Ministry of Planning and Development.

Mr. ANDRIAMIHAJA (Madagascar) said that Malagasy was an agglutinative language belonging to the Malayo-Polynesian family. The Malagasy nation was composed of some twenty tribes, each of which had its own dialect, and the dialect of the centre of the country had become the official language. It had been transcribed in Latin characters at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The problem of toponymy was being studied by the Malagasy Academy. In general it had been agreed that well-known places such as the capital, Tananarive, should retain their present names. Attempts were being made to eliminate confusion between

identical names by the addition of prefixes or suffixes, and certain names consisting of Malagasy words with a French prefix were being entirely transliterated into Malagasy. The preparation of an etymological dictionary was under consideration.

Mr. GOMEZ DE SILVA (Mexico) said that what his country had done so far was to identify the problems of standardization of geographical names. One such problem was the name of the country itself; again, various geographical names, such as that of the highest mountain in Mexico, appeared in a number of forms. Another problem was the use of foreign names in Mexico "Kuwait" and "Madagascar", for example, were encountered in many different forms. There were some sixty indigenous languages in Mexico, and the intention was to investigate the etymology of indigenous place names. Another subject for standardization consisted of the generic names used to describe such geographical features as bays or mountains.

Mr. ORMELING (Netherlands) said that his delegation had submitted document E/CONF.53/L.6 summarizing the work already carried out and that in progress on the national standardization of geographical names. The Netherlands being a very small country with close international economic relationships, many Dutch variants of foreign names had come into use, and a Permanent Board on Foreign Geographical Names had recently been set up to standardize them.

Mr. DAHLBERG (Netherlands), speaking as a representative of Surinam on the Netherlands delegation, said that the problems confronting Surinam with regard to the standardization of geographical names were much more complex than those faced by the Netherlands. Surinam had a multi-national population and a corresponding variety of geographical names. In 1960 the Government had appointed a Commission on Geographical Names to standardize rules for such names. A Commission on the Spelling of the Creole Language had also been set up and had standardized all geographical names of Afro-American origin.

Mr. GLEDITSCH (Norway) said that since the 1890's the Royal Ministry of Education, assisted by an officially appointed Board of Advisers, had been responsible for the standardization of geographical names in Norway and in the Norwegian Arctic and Antarctic territories. It was the task of the Board of Advisers to advise all Government offices and institutions on the spelling of geographical names. In 1913 special instructions had been issued to the effect that all Norwegian place names should be written in accordance with an orthographic system suitable for the standardization of genuine Norwegian dialect material. All later rules were derived from those instructions, and the latest instructions, issued in 1933 and 1957, dealt with specific details of standardization. The Board's work had been based on a twenty-volume compilation of Norwegian farm names. Since 1940 all names on new topographical maps had been written down in phonetic script and checked by specialists, and standardization of the written forms on the maps was based on that material. There was a special Government adviser on Lapp place names, for in northern Norway there were many places with two different names, one Lapp and one Norwegian. Plans had been worked out for a national gazetteer based on 1:250,000 maps. The Norwegian Polar Institute applied the official rules for the standardization of place names in the Arctic and Antarctic areas. Names of special features originally given by explorers of other nationalities were seldom changed. The National names authority was the Board of Advisers on Place Names, and the executive authority was the Royal Ministry of Education. The Norwegian Place Names Archives was responsible for the collection of place-name material, and directed research work in that field. The Scandinavian countries maintained close collaboration in the standardization of geographical names.

Mr. MARTINS (Portugal) said that no great difficulties had arisen in Portugal with regard to the standardization of geographical names, since the competent cartographic departments maintained close collaboration with one another. He hoped that a national authority would soon be established to ensure standardization.

Mr. ROSU (Romania) said that the standardization of geographical names had been receiving attention in Romania for some considerable time. At the end of the nineteenth century the Romanian Geographical Society had drawn up a geographical dictionary for the country. Serious attention had recently been given to the subject, and detailed studies had been carried out by geographers and cartographers. An administrative organ had been set up in 1952 to collaborate with the specialists in work on place names, and an official gazetteer of such names had appeared in 1956. The national organization now dealing with the subject was the National Geographical Committee, which included a sub-committee on geographical names. Many maps on different scales had recently been published, as well as linguistic atlases, an encyclopaedic dictionary and a preliminary glossary of generic names. The practical task of standardization could now be considered almost complete; it remained only to unify certain generic geographical names, to verify the names of certain topographical details, to draw up a bibliography on the subject and to put the glossary of generic names in final form.

Mr. PEREZ GALINO (Spain) said that the national body responsible for the study of toponymy was the Superior Geographical Council, under which the Commission on Geographical Names carried out its work on the basis of the recommendations of the United Nations Group of Experts. The problems involved were relatively simple and concerned mainly the cartographic aspect of the subject. All geographical names on the standard map of the country were currently being revised, and a special Commission had been established to revise cartographic symbols.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.