

PROVISIONAL: FOR PARTICIPANTS ONLY

Distr.
RESTRICTED

8 September 1967

Original: ENGLISH

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE FOURTH MEETING

held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 6 September 1967, at 10.20 a.m.

<u>President:</u>	Mr. BARANOV, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
<u>Rapporteur:</u>	Mr. GOMEZ de SILVA, Mexico
<u>Executive Secretary:</u>	Mr. URETA
<u>Deputy Executive Secretary:</u>	Mr. CHRISTOPHER

CONTENTS:

Exchange of experience on problems identified in the report of the
Group of Experts (agenda item 8) (continued)

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.

E/CONF.53/SR.4
GE.67-18067

EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCE ON PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED IN THE REPORT OF THE GROUP
OF EXPERTS (agenda item 8) (E/CONF.53/L.2, L.4, L.8, L.11, L.38, L.41) (continued)

The PRESIDENT invited comments on problem (e).

Mr. BURRILL (Pan American Institute on Geography and History), speaking at the invitation of the President, said that the problem was complex and would have to be discussed at some length. He proposed that it should be examined in Committee No.3.

Mr. GALL (Guatemala) supported that proposal.

The proposal was adopted.

The PRESIDENT invited comments on problem (f).

Mr. BURRILL (Pan American Institute on Geography and History), speaking at the invitation of the President, said that, in some of the replies transmitted to the Secretariat, countries had stated that the problem did not arise in their case. From such replies it was evident that the problem had not been stated with sufficient clarity, because in reality it was universal. However, it was more likely to arise in the exchange of material between countries than within a given country.

Mr. PEARCY (United States of America) said that, if countries which used languages subject to syntactical and grammatical variations were to decide on one syntactical or grammatical form for each geographical name, all difficulties with regard to international standardization would disappear.

The PRESIDENT invited comments on problem (g).

Mr. MEYNEN (Federal Republic of Germany) said that the optional variations in question should be eliminated. In the example given, the official spelling should be "Rothenburg ob der Tauber".

Mr. BREU (Austria) said that in his country the names of certain communes included a specifying term to distinguish them from those of other communes. The so-called optional part was not really optional but formed part of the official name and must therefore be printed in full on official maps.

Mr. FRASER (Canada) strongly supported the view expressed by the last two speakers. It was the policy in Canada to discourage the use of optional elements in the names of populated places.

Mr. BURRILL (Pan American Institute on Geography and History), speaking at the invitation of the President, said it appeared that the problem which had existed had been solved by countries such as the Federal Republic of Germany, Austria and Canada.

The PRESIDENT invited comments on problem (h).

Mr. MOITORET (International Hydrographic Bureau), speaking at the invitation of the President, said that the problem had been discussed at the Ninth International Hydrographic Conference. A proposal had been submitted to the effect that national hydrographic offices, when issuing maps of their own coastlines, should not change existing names which appeared in the national language; where such a change was unavoidable, the historical name should appear in brackets on the chart. The proposal had been discussed at considerable length and had finally been rejected, firstly because it was substantially covered by other resolutions adopted by the Hydrographic Conference, and secondly in the expectation that a decision might be reached by the present Conference.

He thought that it would be of interest to mention some of the points which had been raised during the discussion. The representative of Burma had opposed the proposal on the grounds that, in many cases, the names now appearing on charts were not names recognized by the local inhabitants and it would therefore be desirable to change them. The Chilean representative, on the other hand, had pointed out that in many cases surveys of coastal areas had been made by nationals of other countries and the names used had been given by them. Cape Horne and Graves Island, for example, were called after explorers. The same representative had also pointed out that in some cases geographical names were employed in the scientific denomination of certain species of marine life, so that it would complicate matters for biologists and other scientists if those names were changed. The Yugoslav representative had said that in many cases coastal names had been given by foreign Powers, so that there was a natural desire to replace them by national names.

Mr. LOXTON (Kenya) suggested, as one criterion for application to the problem, the extent to which a particular name was established. It would obviously give rise to all sorts of difficulties if a well-established name was changed. In his country, the conclusion had been reached that any name appearing in official publications had become established and therefore should not be changed. In the case of names of topographical features in remote areas, the criterion applied was whether they appeared on the 1:1,000,000 scale maps. In many cases, the changing of names might cause greater difficulties than retention of the existing names. One solution might be to give alternative names in brackets.

Mr. SUN (China) said that Chinese geographical names had been in use for a very long time and were therefore difficult to change. His Government had adopted the system of using alternative names if necessary, while the local people continued to use the old name.

Mr. de BLOK (Netherlands) said that the representative of the International Hydrographic Bureau had given some useful information on the difficulties involved; however, that representative had been referring to international nautical charts, whereas the Conference was discussing domestic standardization of names. It was generally agreed that international standardization of names must be based on domestic standardization. So far as the latter was concerned, there was a golden rule that established names should not be changed. The only possible reason for changing such names was the political motive, and that could not be considered sound.

Mr. BURRELL (Pan American Institute on Geography and History), speaking at the invitation of the President, said that, when the Conference took up problem (j), it might find that some changes of name were in the national interest. As the representative of Kenya had suggested, it was necessary to lay down criteria to decide what were established names. In the desire to establish a single standardized form, it was possible that insufficient consideration had been given to the point made by the Chinese representative: namely, that an additional form might have to be used in certain cases. Further consideration might be given to the circumstances in which it was desirable to have more than one form.

Mr. KOMKOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that, as the Netherlands representative had pointed out, the frequent changing of names was undesirable in principle. However, the fact was that geographical names in most countries had changed from time to time, and it was therefore necessary to lay down criteria for such changes. The problem was of particular significance in developing countries where the initial mapping had been carried out by other nations. In such cases there was a good reason for changing names which were neither known nor used by the local people.

Mr. FRASER (Canada) said that in Canada an addition to the guiding principles had recently been approved, to the effect that established names which had proved acceptable and satisfactory should not be changed. In some cases, however, it was desirable to change a name, either in order to avoid duplication or because changing customs had made the old name unacceptable. Nevertheless, he agreed with the representative of the International Hydrographic Bureau that the changing of geographical names might result in confusion among scientists attempting to identify specimens.

Mr. ORMELING (Netherlands) asked the Conference to consider what the term "efficient" meant from the cartographic point of view. In cartography, short single names were the most practical, since on small-scale maps, which were those most used by the public, long names often obscured important features or other names.

Mr. GALL (Guatemala) said that the problem was causing grave concern in his country where, as in many other Latin American countries, geographical names could be changed by presidential decision. When that was done, for instance in the case of names established during the colonial era, it led to grave international difficulties, since it involved changing the international hydrographic charts.

Mr. LEWIS (United Kingdom), explaining the sense in which the word "efficient" had been used by the Group of Experts, said that an established name which had been widely used for many years might often be more effective than a new name because it was known by a greater number of people. On the other hand, if the original name could lead to confusion, for instance, through duplication with other place names, it might be more efficient to give the place a new name.

Mr. BURU (Libya) observed that, in African countries, many place names had been imposed by an occupying Power and, although given on international maps, were not those generally used by the inhabitants or by the present Government. In his country the name Tripoli, given by the Italians, had been replaced by the local name in Arabic spelling.

Mr. ORMELING (Netherlands) noted that the problem was not so much one of finding a new name to replace an established name as one of making a choice between two established names, that shown on the charts and that used by the local inhabitants.

Mr. LEWIS (United Kingdom) said that name-changing should not be done too abruptly. Some names took longer to disappear from current use than others and, while a name should be adopted as both a national and an international standard name if the country concerned so desired, the old name should be phased out until it was no longer so valid as the new one. The governing principle should be that the country concerned had a valid reason for making a change. It should be free to retain even an apparently meaningless name if it felt that that name validly represented the feature in question.

Mr. KHAMASUNDARA (Thailand) said that names to be changed could be divided into two categories: those known to foreigners, which were often based on misunderstanding of the local language and were thus illogical; and local names which, although applicable at the time they were given, had been made inappropriate by changing conditions.

Mr. BURRILL (Pan American Institute on Geography and History), speaking at the invitation of the President, said that the problem was one of the most complex studied by the Group of Experts, for it had many emotional and political implications. He thought, therefore, that it might be useful to amplify the relevant paragraph of the experts' report so as to reflect the points made during discussion.

Mr. KOMKOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) endorsed the Guatemalan representative's comment concerning the difficulties caused by the changing of established names in international waters, with consequent modification of the navigational charts of all countries. Particular attention should be paid to the international implications of any such changes contemplated.

Mr. LEWIS (United Kingdom) suggested that the problem should be discussed in greater detail in Committees Nos. 1 and 4.

Mr. PEREZ GALINO (Spain) thought that those Committees should be given some guidelines. His country's report under agenda item 7 (E/CONF.53/L.35 and Add.1) did not go into all aspects of the problem, but it mentioned many cases in which two names existed for the same place. Detailed studies had been made of the causes and origins of such duplication and it was thought that, as communications improved, such duplication might tend to disappear. Some causes of duplication were purely grammatical, whereas others stemmed from the vernacular usage of the country. He thought that names representing an authentic description of a site or feature should not be altered; he suggested that, when the relevant paragraph was modified, it should recommend retaining names which were either internationally accepted or truly descriptive.

The PRESIDENT said that more detailed discussion on the subject would take place in Committees Nos. 1 and 4.

He invited comments on problem (i).

Mr. FRASER (Canada) said that one of the principles of the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names was, firstly, that personal names should not be used unless it was in the public interest to honour a person by applying his name to a geographical feature, and secondly that, in any case, that should be done during the person's lifetime only in very exceptional circumstances. That was a guiding rather than a mandatory principle; its aim was to discourage the naming of features for political reasons. Each case of such naming would establish a precedent and increase the difficulty of rejecting similar requests in the future. However, in some cases it had been considered a gracious gesture to commemorate the names of worthy pioneer families and, especially in the northern parts of Canada, the practice had been to commemorate the names of servicemen who had died for their country in the Second World War.

Mr. ORMELING (Netherlands) fully supported the principle stated by the Canadian representative. In that connexion he thought that the Conference should discuss only the names of places and of major features, and not minor names such as those of streets and farms, which came under the jurisdiction of local rather than central authorities.

Mr. LEWIS (United Kingdom) cited, as an excellent example of the correct use of commemorative names, the USSR practice of naming lunar features after famous people. Even so, that practice might create problems for the makers of international charts, who would have to decide whether a name should be spelt as in the original language or should be directly transliterated from the Russian. Such commemorative use of historical names for newly discovered and nameless regions should be encouraged, but not the use of names of less eminent persons who were still alive.

Mr. LOXTON (Kenya) agreed with the Netherlands representative that, in general, street names did not fall under the category of geographical names. However, they might do so in the case of very long highways. The principle applied in Kenya was that, if the road was large enough to appear on the 1:50,000 scale map and had been given a name by the local council, its name should be treated as a geographical name even though the local authority was solely responsible for the choice of the name.

Mr. BURRILL (Pan American Institute on Geography and History), speaking at the invitation of the President, drew attention to another aspect of the problem: that of personal names which had been assigned to features at some time in the past, and for a reason since forgotten. In Alaska, for example, places were named after people who had gone there during the gold rush, and it was not known whether they were still alive. Hence he thought it unwise to impose an outright ban on the use of people's names during their lifetime, for much time could be wasted in inquiries.

Mr. LAMBERT (Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research), speaking at the invitation of the President, said that in the Antarctic there was a deliberate policy of honouring explorers, even during their lifetime, by giving their names to geographical features.

Mr. BURRILL (Pan American Institute on Geography and History), speaking at the invitation of the President, said that the same was done for undersea features. The names of famous people were suitable for such use because they presented no problems of domestic standardization.

Mr. BREU (Austria) said that there were two distinct groups of countries: firstly, countries like Australia, Canada and the United States, that contained vast areas which were either unpopulated or had been settled only recently, and where commemorative naming was perfectly acceptable; and secondly, smaller, more densely populated countries like those in Western Europe, where commemorative naming was unusual and should be discouraged. In his own country no geographical entity had been named after a person, either living or dead, since 1830, when a small village destroyed by flooding had been rebuilt and named after the Emperor Francis I, who had been largely responsible for its reconstruction.

The PRESIDENT invited comments on problem (j).

Mr. BREU (Austria) said that in Austria, a Federation of länder, duplication in the names of communes within each land was prohibited. The names of all communes in a given land had to be registered and, in cases of duplication, explanatory notes

had to be added to the names concerned. At the Federal level every effort was made to avoid giving the same name to communes in different länder, but the legal responsibility remained with the land Governments.

Where two geographical features were found to have the same name and the name was widely known, some wording was added to the name in order to distinguish between the two features: for example, two rivers formerly having the same name were now called Warme Fische and Kalte Fische respectively. No attempt was made to avoid duplication in the case of small hills or mountains known only locally.

Mr. MASSAQUOI (Liberia) said that there was considerable duplication of names in parts of West Africa. In Liberia names of towns were duplicated in several countries, but that presented no problem provided that the name of the county was mentioned along with that of the town. The same applied to rivers, streams, hills and other geographical features. Alteration of long-standing names would involve, among other difficulties, political problems beyond the competence of the Board of Geographical Names, and would be resented by travellers.

Mr. KHAMASUNDARA (Thailand) said that his country was in a similar position to that of Liberia with regard to duplication of geographical names: Thailand, like Liberia, found that the problems of duplication could easily be solved by mentioning the administrative division, such as the village, town or city, after a duplicate name.

Mr. LEWIS (United Kingdom) observed that there were many areas in the world where simple methods of identification of the kind suggested by the two previous speakers would not be possible. In a part of west Africa near Nigeria, for example, there were numerous places with the same name in one district. One remedy would be to avoid using names with meanings, such as "Red Hill", "Mud Lake" or "the House of ...", since they were the ones that tended to be duplicated and to cause ambiguity later on.

Mr. KOMKOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republic) said that there were two aspects of the problem. The first, already covered under problem (c), was the case of geographical entities with two or more different names, where a choice had to be made between them. The second was the case of entities in different regions having the same name. It was desirable that each entity should have a different name, but in practice that was no more feasible than, for example, in the case of family surnames. The only solution, therefore, was to recommend some way of differentiating between entities, for example by adding to their names words describing their characteristics.

Mr. MARTY (Cameroon) said that his country had a problem which was probably commoner in African countries than elsewhere: that of people moving out of a small village and setting up a new one with the same name. In Cameroon the difficulty was overcome by numbering such villages with Roman numerals.

In reply to a question put by Mr. BURRILL (Pan American Institute on Geography and History), Mr. MARTY (Cameroon) said that no explanation of the Roman numerals was given in the map margin. The villages were numbered in chronological order of their establishment.

Mr. MAHIAR-NAVABI (Iran) said that, in his country, the descriptive name of a geographical feature - such as the Black Mountain - could not be changed even if it duplicated another. Where there was duplication in the names of villages or small towns, on the other hand, one of the names had to be changed. New names were proposed by the local council for approval by a commission of the Ministry of the Interior.

The PRESIDENT said that, since there was no comment on problem (k) it would be referred to the appropriate committee for discussion.

He invited comments on problem (l).

Mr. BURRILL (Pan American Institute on Geography and History), speaking at the invitation of the President, said that the problem was closely linked to problem (f), so that the comments made on the one problem would in essentials, apply to the other. Problem (l) did not, as a rule, arise within one country; it was only when names were exchanged between countries that the printing form began to present difficulties.

Mr. LEWIS (United Kingdom) endorsed the PAIGH representative's comments.

Mr. MEYNEN (Federal Republic of Germany) also agreed with the PAIGH representative. He suggested that, where deviations in printing form occurred, the Conference should recommend their abolition.

Mr. BREU (Austria) said that in his country there were two categories of geographical names. The first was that of place names in the strict sense of the term: i.e., the names of inhabited places. Such names were often written in historical forms that had been decided upon officially; in such cases the accepted rules of standard German were not applicable and the standard printing form was not used. The second category was that of names given in strict conformity with standard German, which appeared in the latest editions of the official map of Austria.

The PRESIDENT invited comments on problem (m).

Mr. ORMELING (Netherlands) asked if a member of the Group of Experts could explain the implications of paragraph (m).

Mr. BURRILL (Pan American Institute on Geography and History), speaking at the invitation of the President, said that complete avoidance of subjectivity in deciding names was impossible. However, if the process of deciding names could be based on general principles, clearly stated and demonstrably in the public interest, it would not be necessary to rely on subjective judgments to the same degree. The more the process could be reduced to the application of principles and of widely known procedure, the fewer would be the occasions when a choice must be made between subjective evaluations of criteria that might have a bearing on the selection of names.

Mr. FRASER (Canada) said that he had been wondering whether the problem related to the selection of new names by automatic data processing or computerization - the method used in choosing names for new commercial products or companies. He agreed with the PAIGH representative that subjectivity in the selection of new names was unavoidable; all names except truly descriptive ones were more or less artificially contrived.

The PRESIDENT invited comments on problem (n).

Mr. LAMBERT (Australia) drew attention to his Government's report under agenda item 7 (E/CONF.53/L.23) and in particular to principle (f) and the last paragraph in the section on guiding principles for the Nomenclature Board of Tasmania (page 8).

The PRESIDENT, speaking as the representative of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, said that the problem could easily be solved if the basis for a standardized name was local. If such a name was unknown locally, it would take some time to become widely known. A new name could be made mandatory on paper but it would not necessarily be accepted by the inhabitants. For example when streets were renamed, people often went on calling them by the old names. Consequently, in standardizing geographical names, preference should be given to local names.

The PRESIDENT invited comments on problem (o).

Mr. BURRILL (Pan American Institute on Geography and History), speaking at the invitation of the President, said that the point of the comment made on that problem by the Group of Experts was that, if geographical entities could not be located by co-ordinates of latitude and longitude, they would have to be located by some other means. The problem then was to decide what kind of locational device should be used.

Mr. LAMBERT (Australia) asked whether representatives had any preference as between latitude and longitude, on the one hand, and grid co-ordinates on the other.

Mr. LEWIS (United Kingdom) said that he thought both methods should be used. If a location could be expressed in geographical co-ordinates, it should be so expressed; but that did not remove the need to express it in the grid co-ordinates used in the maps, on the appropriate scale, of the country concerned.

Mr. GOMEZ de SILVA (Mexico) asked for comments on the appropriate degree of precision for co-ordinates: i.e., on whether degrees, minutes or seconds should be used.

Mr. LEWIS (United Kingdom) said that it would not be practical to require co-ordinates to be expressed in seconds. They should not, however, be defined with less accuracy than the nearest minute, or much of the value of the gazetteer would be lost. Sometimes it might not be feasible to distinguish between places which had the same name by means of the numerical system referred to by the Cameroonian representative. To avoid ambiguity, therefore, such places should be located to at least the nearest minute, and the nearest half-minute would be even better.

Mr. ORMELING (Netherlands) said that no Dutchman had ever discovered where the Sierra Madre Mountains began or ended. In that case, location to the nearest degree would be sufficient.

Mr. BURRILL (Pan American Institute of Geography and History), speaking at the invitation of the President, endorsed the Netherlands representative's comment. Precision in location would depend on size and other closely related factors. No purpose would be served by attempting to locate geographical features more precisely than the available information permitted. The fineness of reading chosen should be roughly proportionate to the size and numbers of such features.

Mr. LEWIS (United Kingdom) said that he still considered that any unit greater than a minute would not supply, in the language of problem (o), "a precision necessary for all needs". The Netherlands representative's point concerning the Sierra Madre Mountains was more relevant to problem (p).

To revert to the Australian representative's inquiry, the choice between grid references and geographical co-ordinates depended on the degree of accuracy required. For example, in dealing with positions on 1:50,000 scale maps or positions related to maps on that scale, it would be less satisfactory for many purposes to have places defined even to one minute than to one-tenth of grid square. The latter was a far better system of reference in such cases.

Mr. FRASER (Canada) agreed with the United Kingdom representative that geographical entities should so far as possible be located to the nearest minute. That was done in the Gazetteer of Canada series, and there was rarely any need for greater precision. For the volume on British Columbia, however, the grid system had been used. That provided reasonable accuracy, but it was not possible to determine the exact position without referring to one of the best maps. Moreover, in the preparation of a gazetteer, the use of the grid system meant including a longer locational description in the text than was necessary when the geographical co-ordinates were used.

Mr. LEWIS (United Kingdom) said that, in discussing problem (o), the Conference should bear in mind future requirements. The trend was towards automation of cartography and indexing - including the indexing of names - and towards the use of names indexed by some method of data processing. He therefore considered that places should be recorded nationally to a very high degree of accuracy in order to allow for automatic name-placement in mapping and for other elements of automation which would facilitate and simplify the cartographer's task.

Mr. LOXTON (Kenya) suggested that the discussions in the principal committees might reveal that some reference system other than geographical latitude and longitude would better serve the purpose of location: for example, the universal transverse Mercator projection with its kilometric grid, providing references to the nearest kilometre.

The meeting rose at 1.5 p.m.

