

Sec. 20
1966

PREPARATORY MEETING FOR THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES: REPORT OF THE GROUP OF EXPERTS ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. The Group of Experts on Geographical Names set up by the Secretary-General in pursuance of Economic and Social Council resolution 715 A (XXVII) had previously convened at United Nations Headquarters in June-July 1960 to consider the technical problems of domestic standardization of geographical names and the desirability of holding an international conference on this subject. Its conclusions and recommendations were embodied in its report to the Council.^a On the basis of the decision taken by the Council on 16 July 1965, at the 1385th meeting of its thirty-ninth session, that a United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names be convened in Geneva in September 1967, the Group of Experts was invited to attend a preparatory meeting designed to assist in the necessary preparations for the Conference. The meeting was held at Headquarters from 21 March to 1 April 1966.

ATTENDANCE

2. The preparatory meeting was attended by the following experts: Mr. Meredith F. Burrill (United States of America), Mr. P. J. M. Geelan (United Kingdom), Mr. John G. Mutziger (United States of America), Mr. Mo Tsao (China), who were among the original members of the Group when it first met in 1960, Mr. H. A. G. Lewis (United Kingdom), Mr. François Nédélec (France), and Mr. G. Etzel Pearcy (United States of America). Mr. André Pégorier (France), Mr. Said Nafisi (Iran) and Mr. Alfredo Obiols (Guatemala), also from the original Group of Experts, were unable to attend. Mr. H. Ureta, Chief of the Cartography Section of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, served as Executive Secretary of the meeting and Mr. C. N. Christopher, officer in the Cartography Section, as Secretary for the Group.

OFFICERS OF THE PREPARATORY MEETING

3. The preparatory meeting was opened on behalf of the Secretary-General by the Executive Secretary of the meeting. It was agreed unanimously by the Group of Experts that Mr. M. F. Burrill would continue to be the Chairman, and that Mr. P. J. M. Geelan would serve as Vice-Chairman and Mr. F. Nédélec as Rapporteur.

^a See *World Cartography*, vol. VII (United Nations publication, Sales No.: 62.1.25), pp. 7-18.

PRELIMINARY REVIEW AND CONFERENCE ARRANGEMENTS

4. The Group of Experts considered the agenda of the preparatory meeting and undertook a review of all comments received by the Secretary-General from Governments since 1956. Copies of various United Nations publications containing items of interest on geographical names were also made available to the experts for their information.

5. It was agreed that the rules of procedure for the Conference should be those of the United Nations Technical Conference on the International Map of the World on the Millionth Scale, held at Bonn in August 1962,^b with two minor amendments. The first one concerns rule 3 where it will now be stated that the Credentials Committee "shall consist of five members" instead of "seven members". The second one, of a purely stylistic nature, affects the first sentence of rule 32, which should now read: "If, when one person or one delegation is to be elected, no candidate obtains in the first ballot, the majority required,..."

6. With reference to the organization of the Conference, it was agreed to recommend the establishment of four principal committees to deal, respectively, with national standardization, geographical terms, writing systems and international co-operation. A series of topics under each main heading was then agreed upon. Under the proposed rules each country would be represented on each committee, and the committees would not meet concurrently.

AGENDA

7. The tentative agenda circulated to the Economic and Social Council by the Secretary-General as annex I to document E/3907 of 3 June 1964 was amended to provide for consideration of items suggested by the Federal Republic of Germany, "The establishment at United Nations Headquarters of a permanent committee of experts which, after the Conference, could evaluate the results and press on with systematic work on this very extensive and complicated subject", and by Israel, "The desirability of including simple rules of pronunciation in map magazines and the standardization of treatment of generic terms and of generic contents". It was also noted

^b For the text of the rules of procedure, see *United Nations Technical Conference on the International Map of the World on the Millionth Scale*, vol. I, *Report and Proceedings of the Conference* (United Nations publication, Sales No.: 64.1.4), pp. 11-14.

that other countries might suggest additional items later. Although no objections to the tentative agenda had been raised in the replies to the Secretary-General, it was the consensus that the agenda should facilitate orderly consideration of items for which the four committees would have responsibility and should reflect any additional details. Item 8 of the provisional agenda will allow for reports on those problems identified in the previous report of the Group of Experts^e which are not specifically covered under items 9 to 12 of the provisional agenda. Items 8 and 10 to 15, inclusive, on the tentative agenda are now covered by topics appropriate for committee consideration.

8. The provisional agenda as agreed upon by the Group of Experts is as follows:

[The provisional agenda was adopted without change by the Conference. See annex II.]

REGIONAL CONFERENCES

9. On the question of the most fruitful relationship between the forthcoming Geneva Conference and other United Nations conferences, regional working groups or meetings, it was the consensus of the Group of Experts that the second United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Africa, to be held in Tunis, Tunisia, from 12 to 24 September 1966, and the fifth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Far East, to be held in Canberra, Australia, from 8 to 22 March 1967, might usefully include seminars on geographical names. It was noted that while some toponymic problems were universal or nearly so, there was not necessarily universal awareness of them. It was also noted that in accepting names standardized by another country it was helpful to understand as fully as possible the nature of the entities named. This might involve concepts unfamiliar in the accepting country. Map symbolization may not fully reflect local distinctions. These were suggested as appropriate subjects for the seminars referred to above. It was the consensus of the Group of Experts that:

(a) Detailed plans for later regional meetings would best be made at Geneva;

(b) Regional meetings would serve to increase mutual understanding begun at Geneva;

(c) Regional meetings would also provide opportunity for discussion of regional aspects of international co-operation.

OBJECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE

10. It was the consensus that it would be helpful to circulate before the Conference a statement of its specific objectives, elaborating on the more general statements in Mr. Burrill's paper entitled "The nature and scope of the proposed international conference on geographic name standardization", which was circulated by the Secretary-General on 29 July 1963 to all States Members of the United Nations and members of the specialized agencies.

11. The objectives proposed by the Group are as follows:

(a) Removal of any remaining doubt that nationally standardized names are the proper basis for international standardization and that an international alphabet is not feasible;

(b) Development of a greater willingness on the part of each country to take account, in its standardization programme, of the problems that other countries might encounter in receiving and assimilating those geographical names for their own use. This process would involve, on the part of the donor country, all the elements of the original scripts and other linguistic details necessary for proper conversion into other scripts;

(c) Comparison of problems and programmes of various countries;

(d) Identification of topics, areas and categories of names which currently merit further study, and formulation of principles relating to international standardization;

^e See *World Cartography*, vol. VII, pp. 8-11.

(e) Formulation of principles applying to the transfer from one writing system to another;

(f) Romanization from other writing systems for international standardization to be sought from the United Nations Roman-alphabet languages: English, French and Spanish;

(g) Consideration to be given to the establishment of systems for international standardization based on the Cyrillic alphabet and the Arabic alphabet;

(h) Identification and discussion of categories of names of features extending beyond the sovereignty of a single country, e.g. oceans, rivers, mountains, undersea features etc., and examination of possibilities of standardization;

(i) Development of machinery for international exchange of information;

(j) Proposals for the establishment of a programme of regional conferences or working groups to operate after the Geneva Conference;

(k) Promotion of the establishment of names standardization bodies in all countries.

RELATION OF NATIONAL STANDARDIZATION TO INTERNATIONAL STANDARDIZATION

12. To assist in differentiating between national standardization and international standardization, the Group of Experts agreed on the following definitions:

National standardization is the fixing by each country of the writing of the geographical names of that country in the official administrative language or languages of that country;

International standardization is the process by which nationally standardized names of any country are accepted by all other countries. Where for this purpose it is necessary to transliterate or transcribe from the nationally standardized forms, this conversion should be in accordance with the minimum possible number of alphabetic conventions. Although a single convention for each writing system (Roman, Cyrillic, Arabic etc.) may not be immediately attainable, agreement might be reached on the limiting of conversion into the Roman alphabet to systems based on the official United Nations languages—English, French, Spanish.

EXPLANATION OF TOPICS ASSIGNED TO COMMITTEES

13. The intended content of the topics in agenda items 9 to 12 suggested for reference to committees is stated here with such explanatory comment as is thought desirable for clarification.^d

National standardization^e

(a) *Field collection of names*^f (recommendation I)

This involves discussion of:

(i) The number and qualifications of informants;

(ii) Provision of phonetic notation;

(iii) Recording of local languages;

(iv) Indication of type characteristics and extent of feature;

(v) Verification of names on existing maps or in the documentation.

(b) *Office treatment of names*^g (recommendations I, II, III, IV, V, VI, XIV and XV)

(i) Processing of data returned from the field—the removal of inconsistencies in the recordings achieved by different field parties or discrepancies resulting from different qualities of informant;

(ii) Collation of existing map or other documentary material;

^d Against each subject heading to be discussed under agenda items 9, 10, 11 and 12, the appropriate recommendations of the Group of Experts as published in *World Cartography*, vol. VII, pp. 11-14, are given in parentheses.

^e Item 9 of the provisional agenda.

^f Sub-item 9 (a) of the provisional agenda.

^g Sub-item 9 (b) of the provisional agenda.

- (iii) Treatment of phonetic notation in the case of languages which have no written form;
- (iv) Elimination of variation in the syntactical form of the name;
- (v) Systems for maintaining geographical names records.

(c) *Decisions relating to multilingual areas*^b (recommendation VII)

(d) *National gazetteers*¹

- (i) Alphabetizing;
- (ii) Cross referencing;
- (iii) Indication of type of feature;
- (iv) Location by co-ordinates and administrative division;
- (v) Supplementary linguistic information;
- (vi) Historical, former and other variant names;
- (vii) Administrative status.

(e) *Administrative structure of national names authorities*¹ (recommendation I)

(f) *Automatic data processing (ADP)*^k

Automatic data processing provides effective ways of storing, retrieving, maintaining and extracting for publication large numbers of associated data.

Geographical terms¹

- (a) *Generic terms*^m (recommendation XI)
- (b) *Categories*ⁿ (recommendations XI and XII)
- (c) *Glossaries*^o (recommendation XIII)
- (d) *Symbolization*^p

The problems associated with geographical terms indicate the need for a closer collaboration between cartographers and toponymists to provide at one and the same time an improved symbolization and a more exact toponymy.

Writing systems^q

(a) *Transfer of names from one system to another*^r (recommendation VII)

Ideally, conversion from one writing system to another is accomplished by means of transliteration, i.e., a one-to-one substitution of graphic symbols. In practice this is not feasible with a language like Chinese for which conversion can only be on the basis of transcription of an arbitrarily fixed sound system.

(i) *Into Roman*

One, and one only, Roman letter symbol or combination of symbols should be used for a given sound or letter in a transcription or transliteration system and not more than one sound or letter should be represented by a given Roman letter symbol or combination of symbols. For transcription systems this requires an accurate linguistic analysis of the sounds and ranges of distinctive sounds (phonemes), tones, accent patterns and other significant phenomena of a language.

(ii) *Into other writing systems*

Similar considerations would apply also in the case of other writing systems.

(b) *Writing of names from unwritten languages*^s (recommendation VII)

International co-operation^t

(a) *Formation of a United Nations permanent commission of experts on geographical names*^u

The formation of a permanent commission of experts on geographical names would provide for continuous co-ordination and liaison among nations and thereby ensure the implementation of international standardization along uniform lines.

(b) *Steps towards international standardization*^v

Determination of the sequence of measures likely to lead to international standardization.

(c) *Practical measures for the exchange of information*^w

(d) *Post-Conference regional meetings*^x

(e) *Technical assistance*^y

(f) *Treatment of geographical names of features beyond a single sovereignty*^z

It frequently happens that a geographical feature which extends over several countries is differently named in each language. It also happens that a geographical name which appears to be common to several languages is, in fact, variously interpreted as to its extent.

An objective in international standardization would be the adoption of a single name and agreement internationally on the feature to which it applies. If agreement on a single standard geographical name cannot be achieved, some reduction in the number of such alternative names and more uniform acceptance of what the name implies is most desirable.

(g) *Bibliography*^{aa}

Plans for the preparation and maintenance of an international bibliography of works relating to geographical names and their standardization.

SERIES MAPS OF THE WORLD

14. The various existing international mapping projects were considered in relation to the standardization of geographical names. While the Group was unanimously of the opinion that international maps at small scales (on the scale 1:1,000,000 and smaller) are an excellent vehicle for the propagation of names once they have been standardized, they are not a suitable medium on which to base standardization. These series are at too small a scale to provide names information adequate for the purposes of all areas. At the present time, the various series are not consistent in respect of the names they contain. Many names are in need of revision and there must necessarily be a considerable lapse of time between changes in name and subsequent issue of a revised map containing those changes. In addition, these world map series do not necessarily provide what is required in the treatment of the names of international features or of conventional names and, in many instances, are deficient in respect of transliteration.

CLOSING OF THE MEETING

15. The preparatory meeting concluded its work on 1 April 1966 with the unanimous adoption of its report.

^b Sub-item 9 (c) of the provisional agenda.

¹ Sub-item 9 (d) of the provisional agenda.

^j Sub-item 9 (e) of the provisional agenda.

^k Sub-item 9 (f) of the provisional agenda.

¹ Item 10 of the provisional agenda.

^m Sub-item 10 (a) of the provisional agenda.

ⁿ Sub-item 10 (b) of the provisional agenda.

^o Sub-item 10 (c) of the provisional agenda.

^p Sub-item 10 (d) of the provisional agenda.

^q Item 11 of the provisional agenda.

^r Sub-item 11 (a) of the provisional agenda.

^s Sub-item 11 (b) of the provisional agenda.

^t *World Cartography*, vol. VII, p. 5.

^u Sub-item 12 (a) of the provisional agenda.

^v Sub-item 12 (b) of the provisional agenda.

^w Sub-item 12 (c) of the provisional agenda.

^x Sub-item 12 (d) of the provisional agenda.

^y Sub-item 12 (e) of the provisional agenda.

^z Sub-item 12 (f) of the provisional agenda.

^{aa} Sub-item 12 (g) of the provisional agenda.

Appendix I

List of selected technical terms

[The list of selected technical terms is the same as that given in annex I to the first report of the Group of Experts on Geographical Names (see World Cartography, vol. VII, pages 15-16).]

Appendix II

List of national authorities dealing with geographical names

This revised list supersedes the list given in annex II of the first report of the Group of Experts. It includes authorities established or modified in accordance with the recommendations made in that report, and takes into account changes in address or identification of place in the government structure.

AUSTRALIA

Division of National Mapping, Department of National Development, Acton, Canberra, A.C.T.

Antarctic Names Committee of Australia, The Director of the Antarctic Division, Department of External Affairs, 187 Collins Street, Melbourne

BELGIUM

Commission sur la toponymie, Ministère de l'Instruction publique, Brussels

BRAZIL

Conselho Nacional de Geografia Gabinete do Secretário-Geral, Rio de Janeiro

CAMBODIA

Service géographique national, Phnom Penh

CANADA

Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names, c/o Geographical Branch, Department of Energy and Resources, Ottawa, Ontario

CHILE

Instituto Geográfico Militar, Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, Santiago

CHINA

Geographic Section, Department of Land Administration, Ministry of the Interior, Taipei, Taiwan

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Terminology Commission, Central Administration for Geodesy and Cartography, Buckova Ul-Bubeneč, Praha XIX 620

DENMARK AND FAEROE ISLANDS

Stednavneudvalget, Fiolstraede 1, København E.

GREENLAND

Det Grønlandske Stednavneudvalg, Ministeriat for Grønland, Hausergade 3, København E.

ECUADOR

Instituto Geográfico Militar, Calle Ambato 321, Quito

ETHIOPIA

Imperial Ethiopian Mapping and Geography Institute, Ministry of Interior, Addis Ababa

FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

Ständiger Ausschuss für die Rechtschreibung geographischer

Namen, c/o Bundesanstalt für Landeskunde und Raumforschung, Ministerium des Innern, Michaels Hof, Bad Godesberg

FINLAND

General Survey Office, Helsinki

FRANCE

Commission de toponymie, Institut géographique national, 2 Avenue Pasteur, Saint-Mandé (Seine)

GREECE

Council on the Names of Greek Places, Ministry of the Interior, Athens

GUATEMALA

Instituto Geográfico Nacional, Dirección General de Cartografía, Avenida Las Américas 5-76, Guatemala

HUNGARY

Hungarian Committee on Geographical Names, State Office of Geodesy and Cartography, Department of Cartography, Guszev u. 19. sz., Budapest, V

INDIA

Advisory Board for National Atlas and Geographical Names of India, Dr. S. P. Chatterjee, Secretary, Department of Geography, Calcutta University, Senate House, Calcutta 12

INDONESIA

Komisi Istilah, Lembaga Bahasa dan Kususasterann, Departemen P. D. dan K., Jalan Diponegoro 82, Djakarta

IRAN

National Cartographic Centre, Avenue Ghabin, Teheran

IRELAND

The Place Names Commission, c/o Ordnance Survey Office, Phoenix Park, Dublin

ISRAEL

Geographical Names Commission, Office of the Prime Minister, Karen Kayemit Street, Jerusalem

ITALY

Istituto Geografico Militare, Firenze

JAPAN

Joint Committee on the Standardization of Geographical Names, Tokyo

KENYA

Standing Committee on Geographical Names, c/o Survey of Kenya, P.O. Box 30040, Nairobi

LAOS

Service géographique du Laos, Vientiane

LEBANON

Direction des affaires géographiques et géodésiques, Beirut

LIBERIA

National Commission for the Regulation and Standardization of the Spelling of Indigenous Names, Monrovia

MADAGASCAR

Service géographique malgache Tananarive

MOZAMBIQUE

Comissao Consultativa de Topografia, Arquivo Nacional, Praça 7 de Marco esq. Major Ambrósio, Lourenço Marques

NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand Geographic Board, Department of Lands and Surveys, Wellington, C.1

NORWAY

Norsk Stadnamnarkiv, Universitetet, Blindern, Oslo
Norsk Polarinstitut, Observatoriet 1, Oslo

PHILIPPINES

Philippine Committee on Geographical Names, Manila

POLAND

Instytut Geografii, Polska Akademia Nauk, Krakowskie Przedmieście 30, Warszawa

REPUBLIC OF KOREA

National Construction Research Institute, Ministry of Construction, Seoul

SOUTH AFRICA

Place Names Committee of the Republic of South Africa,

Department of Education, Arts and Science, Room 538, van der Stel Building, Pretoria

THAILAND

Royal Thai Survey Department, Bangkok

UNITED ARAB REPUBLIC

United Arab Republic Permanent Committee on Geographical Names, c/o Survey Department, Giza

UNITED KINGDOM

Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for British Official Use, Royal Geographical Society, 1 Kensington Gore, London S.W. 7 (Mr. P. J. M. Geelan, Secretary)

For the Antarctic

Antarctic Place Names Committee, Research Department, Foreign Office, London (Mr. B. B. Roberts, Secretary)

English Place-Name Society, University College, Gower Street, London, W.C. 1

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Board on Geographic Names, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240 (Dr. Meredith F. Burrill, Executive Secretary)

USSR

Glavnoye Upravleniye Geodezii i Kartografii, Postoyannaya Komissiya po Voprossu Transkriptsii, Gorokhovskiy per., 4, Moskva 66

VENEZUELA

Instituto Geográfico Nacional, Caracas

ZAMBIA

Geographical Place Names Committee, Ministry of Land and Natural Resources, P.O. Box 69, Lusaka

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