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TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND COOPERATION IN CARTOGRAPHIC WORK DISCUSSED
AT CONFERENCE ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Sensitizing the public and politicians to the work of national committees dealing with geographical names was essential to their survival, two African representatives told the Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names this afternoon. The Conference was discussing technical assistance and training programmes in toponymy -- the study of place names -- and the transfer of suitable technology to assist developing countries in cartographic work.

The representative of Botswana said that southern African countries also urgently needed technical assistance in the field of toponymy. The representative of Guinea said cartographers in her country faced financial and logistical difficulties, and called for international assistance and cooperation to overcome those problems.

Training courses held in Latin American countries by the Pan American Institute of Geography and History were praised by several Latin American representatives who said that the courses had facilitated the establishment of national commissions on geographical names and the computerization of geographical records.

Public information on the work of national bodies that dealt with toponymy and procedures to allow the public to participate in the naming of geographical features were also discussed. Reports on the various issues discussed were introduced by the representatives of France, Canada, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

The Conference will meet again on Monday, 31 August, to continue its consideration of reports of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, national reports and technical matters.

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Pan American Institute of Geography and History, had been conducted in Spanish, Arabic and English.

The general model for each course had been a two-week programme of lectures, alternated by practical exercises and field work. In those courses, the complete procedure, from collecting names in the field through office editing to representation of the names on maps, was covered. Most of the courses had been accompanied by exhibits of different kinds of material related to geographical names.

Further, he said, it had been generally felt that the courses should not be too standardized or stereotyped. Each country had specific and unique problems and circumstances, and the courses should be adapted to meet the needs of individual countries.

ANATOLYI BONDAR (Ukraine), commenting on the usefulness of training courses, said there were not enough experts on geographical names in the Commonwealth of Independent States. Before the creation of the Commonwealth, the experts had been concentrated in Moscow.

H.A.G. LEWIS, Chairman of the United Kingdom's Permanent Committee on Geographical Names, introduced a report on the transfer of technology to developing countries. He said he had spent five years in the field of transfer of technology to developing countries. Personal computers -- "the pencils of today" -- had become an essential tool in the field of topography. Suitable technology existed for all countries, whatever their level of development, to assist with cartographic work. There was often a shortage of skilled staff in developing countries, he continued. There were also very few bilingual or multilingual national databases in those countries. When conducting field work, it was essential to possess the ability to distinguish between local dialects and the formal language.

Ms. KERFOOT (Canada), introducing a report on technical assistance for the development of national programmes for geographical names, said training courses were not the only way of providing technical assistance for standardization of geographical names. Technical advisers could also be sent to different countries to discuss, with the appropriate authorities, suitable means of establishing names standardization projects.

To set up a national programme for names standardization, she said, the first step was the determination of initial interest and concern for establishing such a programme. Discussions with local management personnel on issues such as what type of names authority would best suit the existing government structure and operation, should follow. The next step would be to prepare a framework of programme development. Finally, arranging for suitable reference documents was the last step.

Mr. ORMELING (Netherlands), introducing a report on coordination between the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names and other technical

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remote areas named features to describe where they had been. The report suggested that mountaineers should propose names only for those peaks that they had climbed.

Mr. RANDALL (United States) introduced a report on the work of the Pan American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH). Since 1987, the Institute had held four courses in Latin America under the theme "Toponymy: the Key to Global Communications". Some 80 students had attended the courses. A fifth course was being planned for Brazil and would be held from 25 October to 6 November. The courses concentrated on issues of local importance, and students had participated in practical exercises on geographical names. Field trips had been conducted in order to illustrate how local place names could differ from those appearing on maps. Local experts had participated in the courses by providing background on the nature of names in the country concerned. Students were taught to name features through field trips.

The representative of Mexico, who had attended the courses held by the Institute in his country and in Ecuador, said they had been very useful. The experts present at the courses had provided extensive information on regional cartographic activities.

The representative of Venezuela said participation in the courses had enabled her country to establish a national commission on geographical names and to improve its methods of work in the field of cartography.

The representative of El Salvador said that his country, too, was forming a committee on geographic names. Thanks to the Institute courses, El Salvador was undertaking to computerize its geographical records.

The representative of Botswana said that similar courses should be conducted in southern Africa. Botswana had a place names commission that had been functioning since 1967. However, last year there had been a proposal to terminate the work of the commission. "Unless we sensitize the politicians in our country, we may face problems in the future", he said. He requested those present at the meeting to assist the countries of southern Africa

The representative of Guinea said she fully supported the remarks of the representative of Botswana. Cartographers in Guinea faced difficulties with regard to the public's perception of their work. Logistical and financial problems also persisted, and financial support was needed. The efforts of the members of the international community must be combined in order to resolve such problems.