

**Twenty-eight session  
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**Item 7 of the Provisional Agenda**

**Implementation of resolutions and activities relating to  
the Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation**

**Achievements and prospects towards the standardization  
of geographical names in Tunisia \***

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## **Achievements and prospects towards the standardization of geographical names in Tunisia.**

Submitted by Tunisia

### **Summary**

Since the enactment of law n° 2009-24 of 11 May 2009, the missions of the National Centre for Cartography and Remote Sensing (CNCT) have been extended to cover more activities including the national mapping with a focus on the standardization issues.

Several actions have been planned since with respect to national priorities in order to meet the users' needs. In the following are mentioned some of the activities in relation with the geographical names issues: The mapping which is obsolete and no longer meets the needs was the first priority and a National Program for Geomatics (a national large scale geospatial infrastructure) was thus set up. In parallel the toponymy sector that has been almost neglected was, with the participation of the National Centre of Cartography and Remote Sensing in the UNGEGN activities, brought forward and a national committee of toponymy was created. The committee will contribute in supporting projects such as the national geolocation database project with standardized toponymic data.

Contribution to the activities of UNGEGN and to the standardization of geographical names with emphasis on their promotion in African countries was provided through the participation of an expert from the CNCT, representative of Tunisia, to some national and international events related to geographical names issues and the presentation of papers recalling the importance of the standardization of geographical names and the urgent need of support by national, regional and international bodies for its promotion in Africa and for the implementation of the Gaborone Action Plan (GAP).

By those projects, the CNCT has in parallel given partial effect to the implementation of UNCSGN resolutions.

## Introduction

Following the publication of the law n ° 2009-24 of 11 May 2009 amending Law No. 88-83 of 11 July 1983 of the creation of the National Remote Sensing Centre (actual National Centre of Cartography and Remote Sensing (CNCT)), the CNCT was instructed to meet national needs for spatial information and participate in the development of national policies and standards for the development of geomatics and the establishment of mechanisms for its implementation.

Several actions have been planned since with respect to national priorities. The following is an overview of the main activities undertaken by the CNCT during the last 4 years with the resolutions they refer to:

### 1. The creation of a national committee of toponymy “NCT”.

- *(Resolution I/4: National standardization).*
- *(Resolution V/15: Establishment of national geographical names authorities).*
- *(Resolution V/6: Promotion of national and international geographical names standardization programs).*

The rich historical heritage of names, important witness on civilizations and cultures that have lived and ruled in Tunisia through 3 millenniums as well as the bilingualism (the official use of the French language in parallel with the Arabic) and the diglossia between the official Arabic and the dialects have all contributed to make the toponymic landscape in Tunisia very heterogeneous and even complex.

Given the negative impact of this on the mapping production, the government has tried since 1983 to rescue the situation and some national standardization' attempts have been made by the ex-National Mapping Agency (Office de la Topographie et de la Cartographie: (OTC)) by trying to set up a unique transcription system for its mapping production plan.

A restricted committee of toponymy was then created within the OTC and has grouped experts and linguists representing three ministries (Ministry of National Defense, Ministry of Equipment, and Ministry of High Education and Scientific Research). This committee was assigned the task to study the amended Beirut 1972' transcription system, endorsed by the UNGEGN.

The Beirut system was then implemented by the OTC with few changes according to the Tunisian dialect. But few years after its adoption, the map users found this system complex and confusing. The system was thus abandoned letting place to several informal ways of transcription.

It was only the 26 February 2013 that the national committee of toponymy was created by the Decree n° 2013-1299, that states its creation, its composition, its missions and functioning rules. (Journal Officiel de la République Tunisienne (**JORT**) N° 20 dated 8<sup>th</sup> March 2013 <http://www.iort.gov.tn/>).

The National committee of toponymy, placed under the tutelage of the ministry of national defense is chaired by the minister of defense and is composed of members representing 11 ministries<sup>1</sup> and 9 national institutions from both government and private sectors<sup>2</sup>.

The main missions of the committee are to ensure the collection, the identification and the control of geographical names; the implementation of the standardization rules in the Romanization of Arabic names and the transliteration of foreign names into Arabic. ; the setting up of gazetteers, atlases and toponymic databases; the ensuring of studies and researches about the historical, socio-economic, cultural and religious origins and meanings of geographical names; the publication and distribution of books, researches, studies and articles on the field and the representation of the Republic of Tunisia at regional and international events in the field of geographical names.

The Secretariat of the National Committee of Toponymy is ensured by the National Centre for Cartography and Remote Sensing whose responsibilities are including:

- Preparing the work' agendas of the Committee.
- Ensuring the implementation of the proposals and recommendations adopted by the Committee.
- Preserving and archiving the documentation of the committee work.

Actually is achieved the nomination by ministries and other bodies, members of the committee, of their representatives within the committee.

The Secretariat of the committee is actually working on setting up an action plan for the upcoming committee activities and the preparation for organizing a workshop probably during November 2014. Also is started the collection and classification of toponyms from the different sources available at the CNCT.

## **2. National Program of Geomatics: the setting up of a national large scale geospatial infrastructure.**

- *(Resolution VIII/6: Integration of geographical names data into national and regional spatial data infrastructure).*
- *(Resolution X/10: Support for the work on the standardization of geographical names)*

Since end of 2012, the National Centre for Cartography and Remote Sensing has curried a deep study in order to develop the sector of geomatics according to the availability of new technologies that would promote the production process and provide accurate and high quality referential databases.

This study was initiated to assess what has been accomplished until 2009, as well as during the CNCT geospatial operational plan of 2010, 2011 and 2012. It was recorded the inability of the current production system to provide complete, accurate and high quality spatial data covering the country.

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<sup>1</sup> Prime ministry; Ministry of (Interior, Development and International Cooperation, Transport, Infrastructure and Environment , Agriculture, Industry, Tourism, Culture, Higher Education and Scientific Research, Commerce & Traditional Industries).

<sup>2</sup> Office of Topography and Cadastre; National Committee of Military History; National Institute of Statistics; Association of Tunisian Geographers ; Navy Centre for Hydrography & Oceanography ; National Institute of Heritage ; Tunisian Post ; Surveying Experts and National Centre for Cartography and Remote Sensing.

In this context comes, since beginning of 2013, the project to set up a national large scale geospatial infrastructure. The study of all the measures, requirements and formalities necessary to set up this structure (RNGE: Référentiel National Géographique à Grande Echelle) including references, technical specifications and legal texts as well as the physical and human resources and the work agenda progress were then initiated.

One of the objectives of this study was also to set the legal, regulatory and technical framework of the national large scale geospatial infrastructure in terms of perceptions, components, standards, accuracy, specifications, responsibilities, priorities and contributions.

The geospatial infrastructure will have 4 main components:

- An ortho-photo database with the specifications and qualifications that provide a complete, current and legible coverage of the country.
- A topographic database with high accuracy data (1/2.000 scale) for urban areas (towns, governorates, cities...) and with smaller scale (1/25.000) for the rest of the territory.
- An address database which must gather all data mainly relating to access roads with geographic points associated with addresses, all localities and municipalities.
- An urban database that mainly provides plots, buildings and cadastral boundaries.

The two first databases are part of the CNCT attributions which has to define the specifications for the content as well as for the process and production methods while the 2 last ones will be respectively covered by the ministries of the interior and real estate affairs.

The toponymic layers constitute an important and integral part of the above mentioned databases. Setting standards is one of the issues of the technical measures of the RNGE. The role of the national committee of toponymy will be ensuring the standardization of toponymic layers and its implementation.

### **3. The setting up of a national geolocation database**

- *(Resolution X/10: Support for the work on the standardization of geographical names)*

Since the publication of the law 24/2009, the CNCT has initiated to make up for the delay of data supporting the traffic and positioning by satellite mainly with the important and urgent demand on these data as they provide significant operating and added value through the variety of applications that organizations from the private sector develop.

In this sense, the center has since the end of 2009 started the establishment of a database for the traffic and geographic positioning that covers the entire country and includes the following layers:

- The road network' layer within and outside the residential areas containing data about roads like the road classification (highway, national, regional, local, street, avenue, etc...); the road names in Arabic and in French; the traffic speed; the traffic direction; etc...

- The points of Interest' layer that includes all public and private facilities according to the activities (public; financial; educational and academic; tourist and entertainment; economic; transport; health etc...).
- The areas names' layer:
- The administrative division' layer.

The toponymy is considered in both languages Arabic and French. Because the focus of the geocoding database project has mainly been on the data collection through the whole country, several toponymic issues need to be reviewed and updated by the national committee of toponymy.

The database has been created according to international standards and specifications which would allow the completion of an integrated system that includes several applications like the tracking, address identification, coordinates identification, trails identification, determination of the intervention' areas, etc...

It is worth noting that the project is in progress (95% achieved) and will be submitted for review and evaluation once it is finished.

## 1. The participation to national and international conferences/meetings :

- (*Resolution X/10 : Support for the work on the standardization of geographical names*)
- (*Resolution I/7 : Regional meetings*)
- (*Resolution V/6: Promotion of national and international geographical names standardization programs*).

Since the 27<sup>th</sup> UNGEGN session, the CNCT has participated to a number of meetings related to the UNGEGN activities:

- Following the recommendations of UNECA/AUC and the UNGEGN's Task Team for Africa that the subject of geographical names in Africa should be an essential part of the agendas of meetings held by the ECA or under its auspices, an expert from the CNCT was appointed by the ECA to participate to the 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Committee of Director-Generals of National Statistics Offices held in Yamoussoukro - Côte d'Ivoire from 30 November to 2 December 2012 where she presented a paper on the activities of toponymy in Africa with a stress on the Gaborone Action Plan and a call for a support by the ECA, AUC and regional centres for its implementation.

As a result to this participation the following **Recommendation III-E-vii a), b) on GN** was adopted:

*“ To endorse the Gaborone Action Plan on geographical names; Call upon ECA, AUC, AfDB and other partners to support the work of the Task Team for Africa in particular and geographical names activities in general”.*  
<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/wgAfrica.html>

- b) The 7th session of the international congress GEOTUNIS under the theme “**Through geographic infrastructure we build the basics for sustainable development**” organized by The Tunisian Association of Digital Geographic Information and the Euro-Arab Union of Geomatics (8-12 April 2013, Hammamet-Tunisia).

The paper presented by the CNCT expert is entitled “*Problématique de la Normalisation des Noms Géographiques: Politique des Nations Unies* ”.  
<http://www.geotunis.org> .