UNITED NATIONS

ECONOMIC
AND
SOCIAL COUNCIL

Distr.
LIMITED

E/CONF.61/L.15
18 January 1972

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

SECOND UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE
  STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
London, 10-31 May 1972
Items 7, 9 (c), 11 (a) (i), 11 (a) (ii),
  12 (b), 9 (d) and 17 of the
provisional agenda

THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES IN ISRAEL[1]/

Paper submitted by the Government of Israel

Since the First United Nations Conference on the Standardization of
Geographical Names held in Geneva in 1967, a number of developments have taken
place in the domain of toponymy in Israel.

Attempts to formalize and standardize the rules governing the transformation
of geographical names from one script to another, as recommended already by the
First General Conference of the International Geographic Union a century ago,
have, as yet, met with partial success only. Moreover, these attempts have raised
two problems: the administrative one of setting up national authorities on
geographical names, and the technical problem of constructing rules for
transliteration (or transcription, as the case may be). In both respects
Israel is in a favourable position. The Government Names Commission, affiliated
to the Prime Minister's Office, is the sole authority on geographical names in
the country. All Hebrew names have a definite official form which appears on
all official maps, and an index system (to be replaced in future by an automated
punch-card and printout register) is in existence. Transliteration rules,
and particularly those from Hebrew into Roman script, have been accepted and
legalized by the Government. However, the general public still uses some
unofficial forms of names as well as various systems of transliteration; hence

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  1/ Figures in the margin refer to agenda items of the provisional agenda
(E/CONF.61/1).

the multiple forms of, for example, the name אֵילַת - Elat (official),
Eilat, Eilath, Elath.

7   The Survey of Israel, as originator of all official maps in Israel including
basic topographic cover, is consequently the chief "consumer" of the output
of the Government Names Commission, being represented on the Commission
by the Chief Cartographer. As an aid to cartographers under training on the
one hand and to the many institutions using geographical names, as well as to
the general public on the other, a leaflet on the transliteration of
geographical names in Israel (1) has been published by the Survey of Israel
in its series of Catographic Papers. This presents all rules pertaining
to the script in official maps - except the choice of typeface and
positioning of names - under one cover. Brief definitions of the various
classes of names, terms, verbal descriptions and other script in maps are
followed by detailed instructions for producing name sheets for the various
scales, with notes on the work of the Government Names Commission and the
utilization of its index of names. Transliteration rules from Arabic into
Hebrew, from Hebrew into Roman script and from Arabic into Roman script
constitute the main body of the paper, which closes with some notes on
the First United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical
Names.

9(c)   In the field of standardization of names, senso stricto, only few
additions to the existing rules followed by the Commission were needed.
One of these governs the case of multilingual areas covered by the work
of the Names Commission: whenever a town or other settlement carries an
Old Testament name as well as a new name and both are in use, the
official Hebrew map will show the former as main and the latter, space
permitting, as secondary name.

In the domain of geographical terminology one of the decisions of
the Government Names Commission pertains to the term "Tel". The Hebrew Tel,
both as a generic term and as a component of a geographical name, today
denotes an archaeological mound, while the Arabic "Tell" has a wider
meaning. Whereas in the past Hebrew names of places in Israel including
the Arabic term "Tell" were formed by the translation of تل into תֵל
(such as Tel, according to the official transliteration rules from Hebrew
into Roman script), local morphology is now taken into account, so that
Tell is translated into either Har (mountain) or Giv'a (Hill). Thus,
Tell Warda becomes Har Warda, while the archaeological site Tell el Qāḍī
remains Tel Dan (Qāḍī = Dan = Judge).

11(a)(i)   The transliteration systems employed by the Survey of Israel in
all authoritative maps have by now been highly crystallized and
standardized. The transliteration from Hebrew into Roman script,
based on the "simple" (as against the "exact" or "scientific") method
evolved by the Academy of the Hebrew Language (2), has had one addition,
namely the acute accent signifying a stressed Hebrew zeré (i.e. é).
Thus Bet Hillél, Bet Él, but Elat (the two former names have stressed,
the latter and unstressed, zeré in Hebrew).

11(a)(ii)   The system for transliterating from Arabic into Hebrew as used by the Survey of Israel is based, with a few minor modifications, on that evolved by the British Mandatory Government in 1931 (3). This system requires the use of vowel points which are always included in official maps, as well as a number of diacritical signs. However, the Ministry of the Interior utilizes a somewhat different system (4) employing Hebrew letters for vowel points. Work by representatives of both offices has already markedly reduced the differences between the two systems.

12(b)   While transliteration is used for the transfer of Hebrew and Arabic place names in Israel into Roman script, the European conventional form is employed in a small number of cases. Thus, Jerusalem and not Yerushalayim, Nazareth and not Nazerat, Tiberias and not Teverya, Haifa and not Hefa.

9(d)   The problem of the compilation of a complete index of geographical names in Israel has, as yet, been only partially solved. A gazetteer of all cities, towns, villages and other settlements accompanies the 1:250,000 scale map of Israel. A complete list of the approximately 4,500 geographical names appearing in the 1:250,000 map was prepared especially for the English edition of the Atlas of Israel which was published in 1970. A listing of all names treated by the Government Names Commission either in the first instance (new names given by the Commission) or in the second (existing names ratified by the Commission) exists only in the form of card files. This very detailed source material includes, inter alia, the type of object named, present and former names, co-ordinates, administrative data such as dates and authorization of changes, Official Gazette issues in which these were published, etc.

17   It is intended to transfer the card file mentioned in the previous paragraph onto punch cards, with two aims in mind. Firstly, processing will be greatly facilitated; thus, alphabetic files pertaining to specific generic types of objects can be easily generated and printed. And in addition, updating and printing can be speeded up, especially if the computer line-printer prints directly onto repro material.

    The chief obstacle to the automation of a Hebrew names file is the need for vowel points, which cannot conveniently be punched or printed in the ordinary way by a computer-cum-lineprinter system. One solution is the manual addition by typesetting of those points, though this would markedly detract from the greater speed possible through automation. Another would be the adoption of unpointed orthography in which letters are substituted for vowel points. A combined computer-photosetting system might be the answer. However, the entire problem is still under review, and it is hoped to report on progress in this field at the next Conference.

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(2) Rules for "Simple" and "Exact" Transliteration, Israel Official Gazette No. 519 of 23 Jan. 1957 (in Hebrew).

(3) Transliteration from Arabic and Hebrew into English, from Arabic into Hebrew and from Hebrew into Arabic. Government of Palestine, Jerusalem 1931.

(4) Rules for the Transliteration from Arabic into Hebrew and for the Spelling of Arabic Names. Ministry of the Interior, Department of Minorities. 3rd ed. Jerusalem 1966 (in Hebrew).