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NATIONAL STANDARDIZATION

Document prepared by the Government of Guatemala

Although 2,000 years have passed since Horace wrote his epistle to Julius Florus, the concepts in it may still be applied to geographical names. Moreover, all the countries of Latin America, in particular, feel a great need to study, express their opinions on, determine and record their geographical names in the most uniform manner possible along certain basic lines as experience and local usage dictate.

Since earliest antiquity, man has always tried to provide distinct geographical names for all his surroundings, since this has always been the only way of accurately determining where the different features are situated.

In addition, it should not be forgotten that standardization at the national level is the basis for international standardization, because only this makes it possible to avoid the anarchy prevailing in this field and at the same time to exercise the necessary control over geographical names.

The writer has always held the view that countries which are not yet privileged to have their own national geographical names authority should proceed to establish one, as an official specialized body, as soon as possible, with a view to benefiting from its advisory services in determining, redetermining or possibly changing geographical names, applying the procedures established for the purpose. Thus, when the national authority decides on a particular name, it will be the only official name and must therefore be disseminated as widely as possible within the national territory.

The two regional meetings on the standardization of geographical names, held in Central America at this writer's request (Guatemala, 7-11 October 1968, and Panama, 19-23 October 1970), dealt thoroughly with national standardization.

This subject will also be specifically covered at the proposed first South American regional meeting on the standardization of geographical names, which the Government of the Federative Republic of Brazil has agreed to sponsor in 1972, also at the request of this writer, through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Palácio Itamaraty, Brasília.

I feel that I must, in all fairness, express my deepest gratitude to Alfredo Obiols Gómez, the engineer who pioneered the study of geographical names in my country, and who, in his capacity as Director General of the National Geographical Institute of Guatemala, laid down the basic procedures for standardization on 22 July 1960. These procedures were later supplemented on the basis of the conclusions of the First United Nations Conference, held in September 1967 at Geneva, and by additional procedures found necessary in practice.

The process of allocating geographical names can never be static; it must be essentially dynamic, since it constitutes an encyclopaedic register which faithfully reflects the environment in which we live and is thus subject to a continuous process of adjustment and change, always open to innovations and corrections brought about by the progress of research, by the action of the forces of nature and the hand of man in transforming the face of the earth and by constantly changing events.

In order that the action taken in Guatemala in regard to standardization at the national level may be of use to the experts attending the Second Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, there follows a description of the procedure followed in Guatemala, which has been adopted by a number of countries in the region.

As already indicated, the basic standardization procedures to be followed in Guatemala were introduced on 22 July 1960, and the Joint Commission on Geographical Names was established on the same date. In accordance with the conclusions of the First United Nations Conference, held at Geneva, its name was changed to the National Geographical Names Authority of Guatemala as from 2 March 1968.

Under the Constitution, Guatemala is divided politically and administratively into departments, which, in turn, are made up of municipios (municipalities). Since, for the sake of convenience, it was decided to use the Dewey decimal system, each department, in alphabetical order, was assigned a number, followed by a sub-number for each of its municipios. Each department and municipio has its own cardboard folder with its decimal number and standardized name indicated on the tab.

Each folder contains a rough sketch which, for obvious reasons, was requested from the municipal authorities, all the administrative correspondence with those authorities relating to geographical names, copies of governmental decisions, information on boundary disputes, if any, and, at the beginning, a list of all geographical features, including all types of rural properties, prepared by the National Geographical Names Authority.

This information is kept up to date and supplemented with data from the duly signed certificates issued by the municipal authorities to the classification and review teams when the latter find and pinpoint on aerial photographs features previously omitted from maps and therefore representing new toponyms. After being studied and adopted, the new names are entered in the catalogue of information on the municipio by the National Geographical Names Authority. In cases where there is a change of toponym, the municipal authorities are advised accordingly.

Before leaving for the field, each classification and review team applies for a copy of the file, which is provided mechanically for each municipal area in which it will work. When it returns with the classified vertical aerial photograph, the certificates relating to the new toponyms are received. Next, geographical names which have already been standardized are checked to see whether they are accurate designations. Where new toponyms are concerned, the first step is to determine whether they appear correctly on the classified photograph in line with the pertinent certificates. Each name is then studied individually, and the possibility of duplication and all other factors affecting its acceptance are reviewed. Any doubts which arise are first discussed with the cataloguer concerned. If they cannot be resolved in the office, the respective municipal authorities are consulted. This procedure is followed for aboriginal names, especially where their etymologies are concerned.

The aerial photograph, with all the names checked and the new names accepted by the National Geographical Names Authority, is sent for photogrammetric compilation.

Once the map is compiled, a copy of the basic manuscript of geographical names is received and is subjected to further review. Any doubts which might arise are noted on the copy of the manuscript, for instance, the absence of names for population centres, elevations, watercourses, etc., depending on the scale of the map. All this is sent to the review department for consideration in conjunction with any uncertainties there may be relating to the photogrammetric compilation. The uncertainties are investigated in the field by the field review team.

As soon as the necessary information is received, the National Geographical Names Authority takes appropriate action and, when all the discrepancies have been cleared up, publishes the new names as official. Appropriate annotations are made on the copy of the names manuscript, which is returned to the review department, where the changes are noted as appropriate; the duly corrected material is then sent to the Printing Department for colour separation.

When the colour proof is ready, a final check of the geographical names is made in the office before the map is printed.

It should be noted that for proposed new geographical names, the two forms of which copies are annexed hereto are used: the domestic geographical name report (annex I) and the form for the proposed name of a prominent unnamed geographical feature (annex II).

In its sincere desire to co-operate fully, the National Geographical Names Authority of Guatemala will make available to representatives the experience it has acquired in 10 years of operation, as well as all information relating to the standardization of geographical names at the national level.

It is well known that the standardization of geographical names is exceedingly difficult and that it is impossible, in many cases, to achieve any practical results. As an example, it should be sufficient to recall that the writer, at the closing meeting of the First United Nations Conference at Geneva, remarked that, owing to an irony of fate, it had not been possible to decide on one of the many official names of the beautiful Swiss city in whose Palais des Nations we had met, and that the city continued to be known as Genf, Ginevra, Genève, Geneva and Ginebra.

We should, however, find some consolation in the fact that this aspect of geographical nomenclature is neither peculiar to nor characteristic of the great, highly developed European countries, nor is it true that they alone can take pride in the awesome confusion which prevails among the official variants of their geographical names, a random example of this being Aix-la-Chapelle, Aachen, Aquisgrana, Aken or Aquisgrán, all of which refer to the same city.

Similarly, we in Latin America, who live in developing countries, or what has lately come to be called the Third World, have the privilege of being in a position to contribute to the world-wide confusion in the field of geography relating to standardization at the national level, for we, too, have a great number of geographical names, optional or otherwise, but all official, so that we can make our modest contribution towards increasing yet further the anarchy which exists in this regard.

Although there are numerous examples in every country, a reference to only two of the many cases which have arisen in Guatemala should be sufficient to illustrate the point. I shall first take the name of the second largest city in my country, which offers a typical example of different geographical names, all of which have appeared in official documents at one time or another:

- (1) 1. Culahá; 2. Culajá; 3. Xelajuj; 4. Xe-lajuj; 5. Xelajú; 6. Xela;
7. Vucxiquín; 8. Vucubxiquín; 9. Lahum Quiej; 10. Xelahun Queh; 11. Lahunquej;
12. Culahá Ah Xelahú; 13. Quetzaltenango; 14. Quetzaltenanco; 15. Quesaltenango;
16. Quesaltenanco; 17. Quezaltenango del Espíritu Santo; 18. Quezaltenango.

This last name, Quezaltenango, became the standardized name after archives, philological studies, historical literature, various maps, etc., dating back over four centuries, had been consulted.

By way of information, in the Mam language, Culajá means "gorge of water", owing to the town's situation in a valley of the high plateau 2,300 metres above sea level and to the rivers in its environs. Xelajuj comes from the Quiché words xe = "underneath" and lajuj = "ten", meaning "beneath, or at the foot of, the ten peaks", since Quezaltenango is indeed situated in a valley at the foot of

10 peaks which rise around it. At this point it should be mentioned that the Quichés are supposed to have captured this region from the Mam race in the sixteenth century; even today the linguistic frontier lies at the nearby town of Concepción Chiquirichapa, where the Mam race and language still prevail. Quezaltenango, so spelt, appears in the first known report of Pedro de Alvarado to Hernán Cortés, dated 28 July 1524. It comes from the Nahuatl words quetzalli = "quetzal" (Pharomacrus mocino) and tenango, from tenanco, meaning "town", perhaps owing to the great number of quetzal birds which formerly abounded in the region.

(2) The other example is provided by the lake, 99 square kilometres in area, on an island in which Flores, chief town of the department of El Petén, in the northern part of the country, is situated:

1. Yaxhá; 2. Yaxjá; 3. Yzá; 4. Ytzá; 5. Itzá; 6. Petén Itzá; 7. Petén Ytzá;
8. Petén Yzá; 9. Remedios del Petén; 10. Nuestra Señora de los Remedios;
11. Nuestra Señora de los Remedios y San Pablo del Itzá; 12. Nuestra Señora de los Remedios del Petén; 13. Petén; 14. del Petén; 15. de Itzá del Petén;
16. de Itzá de Petén; 17. San Andrés; 18. de San Andrés; 19. Chaltuná;
20. de Chaltuná; 21. Chaltuná o del Petén Izá; 22. Chaltuná o del Petén Itzá;
23. Taizá; 24. Tayasal; 25. Haltunná; 26. Jaltunná; 27. Flores; 28. de Flores;

thus, there are 28 different names which, at one time or another since the fifteenth century, have designated the same body of water, each of them an official name. With understandably universal approval, the name of the lake was standardized as Petén Itzá, which is the most common form and means "island of the itzás".

In Maya, Petén has the etymological meaning of "island", which was later extended to the whole of the territory corresponding to the existing department established by the Governmental Decision of 8 May 1866. Penelo, following Maler, writes that itzá is a Nahuatl word (its-atl) meaning "place of the water in which blood (from religious sacrifice) is washed off". According to Becerra, it is a Maya word (its-haa) meaning "sweet" or "drinkable, water". In Maya, Chaltuná means "lake with houses", while Tayasal (tayax-hal, the letter "h" having its earlier sound, equivalent to that of the modern Spanish "j"), means "amid the green waters".

Cases like these are not exceptions which occur only in Guatemala, but are found in most countries. Consequently, steps must be taken to find a solution. To this end, it is not only necessary to utilize the procedures outlined at the First United Nations Conference, held at Geneva in 1967; each country must also proceed to lay the groundwork for its own national standardization. Ideally, a national geographical names authority should operate in each country, and it is considered essential that the following guidelines shall be followed from the outset:

1. To make any unnecessary or ill-considered change in a geographical name is tantamount to destroying living monuments of history and language, for geographical names are hallowed by usage, and to destroy them is to wipe out the traces of history, thus sacrificing national identity in order to satisfy, in most cases, the whims of the moment.

2. The syntactic patterns of geographical names tend to be idiosyncratic, since the phonological changes or changes in the language to which they belong produce reflexes which are irregular in relation to their etymological meaning.
3. Geographical names reflect the most salient characteristics of the regions which they designate, for it is well known that those who coined the names which have been retained always sought out the most colourful feature and, in expressing it, formed rich and euphonic terms to designate the places through which they passed or in which they lived. However, it must be borne in mind that orthographic analysis of the "geonyms" with which we designate all geographical features informs us about their genealogy, variations and history, for words, like all living things, are also subject to evolution, which must be investigated where geographical names are concerned.
4. Unless there are sufficiently important and duly justified reasons for doing so, an established geographical name which has been declared official should be neither changed nor replaced.
5. It is inadvisable to introduce proper names honouring any person into national geographical nomenclature unless at least 15 years have elapsed since his death.
6. The ideal to be aimed at is that all geographical names should be concise, euphonic and, so far as possible, descriptive of the place to which they refer.
7. In cases where geographical names may give rise to confusion owing to duplication within the same municipal jurisdiction or equivalent, solution to the problem should be sought in the most impartial manner.
8. From any point of view, geographical names containing the following should be considered unacceptable:
 - (a) Contrived or discordant combinations formed of words from different languages, except where hallowed by usage.
 - (b) Corrupt or altered terms.
 - (c) Obscene or blasphemous connotations.
 - (d) Names which may in certain cases be interpreted as publicity for any commercial or industrial enterprise.
9. Optional portions of geographical names should be avoided so far as possible.
10. Only those geographical names concerning which the necessary information is provided in writing should be accepted for consideration.

11. No governmental, autonomous, semi-autonomous or private body may use any geographical name or designation of an inhabited place unless the name or designation is declared official.

It should be noted that, in the matter of national standardization, the basic Guatemalan standardization procedures have been adapted to the needs of other countries of the region.

General definitions

- (a) Geographical name means a proper name composed of one or more words designating and delimiting an area as an individual entity or geographical characteristic.
- (b) Geographical entity or geographical characteristic means any geographical feature, object or locality which is precisely defined.
- (c) Toponym means the name of any geographical entity or characteristic.
- (d) Topographic feature means any geographical feature of elevation, also known as oronym.
- (e) Hydrographic feature means a geographical feature consisting of a body of water.
- (f) Cultural feature means a geographical feature made or significantly changed by man.
- (g) Generic term means a term forming part of a geographical name which indicates the type of the designated entity and which has the same meaning in current local usage.
- (h) Specific term means that portion of a geographical name which particularizes it.
- (i) Map information means words appearing on maps which are not the names of geographical characteristics but serve only to indicate them.
- (j) Transliteration means the letter-for-letter transfer of a word from one alphabet to another alphabet.
- (k) Transcription means the phonological representation of a word of one language in another.
- (l) Standardization of geographical names means the process by which the competent authority establishes names, although their use may not be mandatory.

General considerations

Toponymy, or the science of toponyms, requires personnel trained in geography, linguistics and history.

A map is a scientific record, a research document and a work of art.

Similarly, a geographical name is a historical record which should give life and personality to a map. It should aid in correct identification and understanding and is, in general, subject to changes and developments which should be controlled.

Apart from the problems of standardization, the establishment of a geographical name consequently demands careful studies based on research, analysis, comparison, interpretation, etc., until the proper choice is arrived at, while the need for simplicity and ease of acceptance by the user must not be ignored.

No decision should ever be made to incorporate a doubtful name in an official document of great value like a map, geographical dictionary or glossary.

All doubtful geographical names should be studied from the point of view of linguistics, semantics, etymology, orthography, geography, history, tradition, etc., in keeping with the region and language to which they belong.

The National Geographical Names Authority

The President of the Republic, acting through the Ministry of Internal Affairs, is empowered to name, rename or change the names of geographical entities, characteristics or features.

In accordance with statutory provisions, the Executive, before taking decisions in this regard, consults the National Geographical Institute and the General Directorate of Statistics.

By virtue of an administrative provision, the National Geographical Institute, owing to the nature of the studies and work it carries out, is the body responsible for studying, recommending and recording the country's geographical names. No name is deemed official unless it is recorded by the National Geographical Names Authority.

All responsibilities relating to geographical names have been delegated by the National Geographical Institute to the National Geographical Names Authority, which is composed of two bodies: the Working Group and the Advisory Group.

The former is made up of three staff members of the National Geographical Institute: the Head of the Human Geography Department, the Head of the Review Department and the Head of the Geographical Division. Their duties in this regard are the following:

(a) to carry out research, compilation, analysis, comparison, interpretation and evaluation in connexion with each geographical name;

(b) to submit to the National Authority drafts concerning decisions, methods and procedures in the field of standardization;

(c) to record, transcribe and publish the decisions taken and to communicate or exchange information with foreign bodies responsible for the standardization of geographical names.

The second body, which constitutes the National Authority, has as its chairman the Director-General of the National Geographical Institute; the Head of the Department of Human Geography serves as member and Executive Secretary, and representatives of the following institutions are members:

(a) the National Geographical Institute;

(b) the Faculty of Humanities at the University of San Carlos de Guatemala;

(c) the General Directorate of Statistics;

(d) the National Indian Institute;

(e) the Guatemalan Academy, correspondent with the Spanish Academy of the Language;

(f) the Geographical and Historical Society of Guatemala;

(g) the Guatemalan National Section of the Pan American Institute of Geography and History.

The basic duties of the National Geographical Names Authority are:

(a) to establish general, clearly defined and well-publicized principles in order to facilitate the acceptance of standardized names;

(b) to provide the necessary advice concerning geographical names in the Republic;

(c) to approve methods and procedures for the standardization of geographical names;

(d) to provide advisory services in its field of specialization.

Rules

1. The National Geographical Names Authority shall propose to the National Geographical Institute the methods to be used in determining current names and

their proper spelling. The method may be varied as necessary in different linguistic regions and must comprise:

- (a) The most thorough inquiry possible, to provide information on:
 - (i) the way the name is written on old maps.
 - (ii) the way the name is written on modern maps.
 - (iii) the way the name is written in administrative, land registration and registry instruments, etc.
 - (iv) the way the name is written in archives and historical literature.
 - (v) the written, phonemic, phonetic and other forms of the name, and its etymology.
- (b) The size and nature of the named feature must be determined as accurately as possible;
- (c) In the initial phase, personnel with sufficient training to deal with and recognize linguistic phenomena should be employed so far as possible;
- (d) In the determination of spellings, the following must be complied with:
 - (i) the rules of the Royal Spanish Academy of the Language, where Spanish or Castilian names are concerned;
 - (ii) the rules of the Guatemalan Academy, correspondent with the Spanish Academy of the Language, where Guatemalanisms are concerned;
 - (iii) the rules of the National Indian Institute, where aboriginal names are concerned.

2. It must lay down general, clearly defined and well-publicized principles to facilitate the acceptance of standardized names. With reference to these principles, the following must be borne in mind:

- (a) The effectiveness with which names identify and facilitate reference to individual geographical entities;
- (b) The basis for deciding whether to retain or change names;
- (c) The method of reviewing and up-dating these procedures;
- (d) The habits and observed or inferred attitudes of people towards geographical names must not be overlooked;

(e) Systematic treatment should incline towards retaining names, rather than changing them. Exceptions should be fully justified;

(f) So far as possible, meaningful components of names under consideration should not be eliminated;

(g) Translations should not be used unless they are accepted;

(h) Duplication should be eliminated so far as possible. To this end:

(i) changing the less important of the duplicated names should be proposed;

(ii) if the change is not desirable or not accepted, a meaningful component should be added. In all cases, it is desirable to determine the degree of duplication;

(i) No decision to change a geographical name or to choose among several of equal authority should be made without first consulting the users and determining their probable reaction;

(j) For the spelling of aboriginal names, the symbols studied and approved by the National Indian Institute must be used;

(k) The names of physical features must be clear and precise. In other words, it is necessary to determine what the name designates, and its extent;

(l) Names should generally be assigned to physical characteristics which are only partially named;

(m) So far as possible, names with optional components should not be standardized. Where this cannot be avoided, the cases in which the optional component is to be used must be clearly specified;

(n) Generic components should not be deleted where they are considered necessary to avoid confusion;

(o) Where Guatemalanisms are used, their correct meaning must be indicated;

(p) A choice must be made between parallel forms or grammatical variants;

(q) It must be clearly indicated whether or not articles or prepositions should be included in names;

(r) Similarly, the use of sigla and/or abbreviations must be regulated;

(s) Localities must be pinpointed as accurately as possible, using either geographical co-ordinates or distances from a known fixed point;

(t) Gender, number, etc. must be specified where necessary.

3. It should be understood that the standardization procedures described should not be considered exhaustive. The National Geographical Names Authority will propose to the National Geographical Institute further principles of standardization as practice and usage dictate.

In short, in order to standardize geographical names at the national level it is necessary to follow guidelines clearly laid down by a national names authority.

This is the only way of ending the present chaos and at the same time of exercising the necessary control over geographical names.

INFORME DE NOMBRE GEOGRÁFICO DOMÉSTICO

Nombre controversial	Nombre recomendado:	Categoría:	
Cambio de nombre			Municipio:
Otro			
Nombre actual:			

Latitud ____° ____' ____" norte, Longitud ____° ____' ____" oeste.

Descripción del accidente: En lo pertinente, proporciónese configuración, longitud, ancho, dirección o rumbo, dirección y distancia de las extremidades desde puntos con nombres establecidos, elevación (si es conocida) y otros detalles adicionales:

Mapas en que figura el nombre actual (Incluyendo fechas y escalas), u otras fuentes	Nombre variante	Mapa o fuente usando el nombre variante

Información disponible en cuanto al origen, grafía y significado etimológico del nombre recomendado, y/o declaración relacionada con la naturaleza de la diferencia en su uso, o aplicación:

Nombre propuesto por:

 (Nombre) (Firma) (Dirección)

 (Cargo u oficio) (Años de residencia) (Fecha)

Dato obtenido por:

 (Nombre y firma) (Cargo) (Fecha)

AUTORIDAD NACIONAL DE NOMBRES GEOGRÁFICOS

RESOLUCIÓN :

Ciudad de Guatemala, ____ de ____ de 19 ____

Nombre geográfico aprobado y registrado: _____ Accidente: _____

 Secretario Ejecutivo

Visto Bueno:

 Presidente

FORMULARIO PARA NOMINACIÓN DE UN ACCIDENTE GEOGRÁFICO PROMINENTE SIN NOMBRE

Nombre propuesto: _____ Pronunciación fonética: _____

Municipio: _____ Departamento: _____

Ubicación Latitud _____ " _____ ' _____ " norte Longitud _____ " _____ ' _____ " oeste.
del
accidente

Descripción y extensión del accidente: _____

Distancia y dirección de accidentes conspicuos o poblados: _____

Base de conocimiento que el accidente no está nominado: _____

Motivo de selección del nombre descriptivo
 por un accidente cercano
 otro (Indíquese el motivo): _____

Si es descriptivo, especifíquese el motivo por el cual es apropiado: _____

Si es nominado por otro accidente, especifíquese por cual: _____

1. Nombre: _____ Lat. _____ " _____ ' _____ " norte; Long. _____ " _____ ' _____ " oeste.

2. Variantes conocidas en la grafía u otros nombres: _____

3. Número de años conocido por su nombre actual: _____ Optativo: _____

4. Relación entre los dos accidentes: _____

Menciónense los anexos que se incluyen como ayuda en la identificación Mapa en que se ha señalado: _____
Fotografía aérea marcada: _____
Otros: _____

Presentado por: _____
(Nombre y firma) (Cargo u oficio)

(Institución) (Fecha)

AUTORIDAD NACIONAL DE NOMBRES GEOGRÁFICOS

RESOLUCIÓN :

Ciudad de Guatemala, _____ de _____ de 19 _____

Nombre geográfico aprobado y registrado: _____ Accidente: _____

Visto Bueno:

Secretario Ejecutivo

Presidente