

New York, 26 February-9 March 1979
Agenda item No. 6

REPORT OF AFRICA WEST DIVISION

(Paper submitted by Liberia)

As the duly elected Deputy Chairman and alternate representative for Africa Division serving as Chairman in the absence of my distinguished friend, Mr. Coker, I bring felicitations and congratulations to the members of this august Group of Experts of the United Nations.

During the period under review there has been a significant measure of progress in the West African Region in the area of standardization of geographical names. There is now a general realization of the need for standardization in every area. Every country in the Division is now actively engaged in standardization of geographic names and the preparation of their respective national gazetteers. Liberia and Nigeria are now each working on the third edition of National Gazetteers of their respective nations.

An encouraging note rests upon the fact that each nation in this division has adopted the decision not only to Romanize the script but has actually gone a long way towards implementing this decision.

The magnitude of the task involved can be determined by the number of linguistic groups in each country. Liberia, for example, as small as it is, compared to Nigeria, Ivory Coast and Guinea, has 27 linguistic groups. The encouraging note in this respect, however, is the fact that standard rules for pronunciation and for the use of international phonetics in the spelling are being employed; because, in many cases no fixed spelling of place-names is in vogue in rural areas thereby leaving the way open for accommodating a systematization along guidelines in the manner of naming and spelling place-names.

During the period covered by this report - since the last meeting of the West African Division in Athens - attempts were linked with the time and venue of the meeting of the scheduled fourth meeting of the UN Cartographic Conference for Africa which was postponed from September 1978 in Abidjan to April/May and belatedly to November 1979.

We wish to assure you however that with the current realization by all countries in this Division of the importance of standardization we will convene a Division meeting this year and vigorously encourage every member to accelerate its place names standardization programme to provide arrangements for mutual technical assistance in this respect and to ensure frequent and systematic meetings of the Division between now and the next session.

I personally assure you that I would put my hands to the plough and try to secure my Government's sponsorship in my behalf to visit countries in the Division to promote this cause vigorously.

We should before closing express that if we had had a more timely notice and if the date of this session had not been drawn in, it would have been possible for us to have secured reactions from other members of the Division.

In closing, we wish to express thanks to the Secretary for his success in convening the meeting under such extenuating circumstances and we wish for the group a hearty and prosperous session.

I thank you.