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Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

New York, 31 July – 9 August 2012

Item 5 of the provisional agenda*

**Reports on the work of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical
Names, its divisions, working groups and task teams since the Ninth
Conference**

Activities of Asia South-West Division (other than Arabic)
United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names

Submitted by the Asia South-West Division (other than Arabic)**

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** Prepared by Iranian Committee for standardization of Geographical Names (ICSGN), National Cartographic Center (NCC)

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In the name of God

**Activities of Asia South-West Division (other than Arabic) (ASWD) –
United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN)**

Introduction

Given their historical background, geographical connections, and language ties, Asia South-West Division (other than Arabic) member states are profoundly linked to each other in cultural and social areas where names of places and geographical features play a significant role in connection the nations of the region.

Today, pervasiveness of media and quick dissemination of information have significantly increased use of geographical names. Therefore, nations and states of the region can extend their cultural and economic ties by registering, publishing, and using correct place names.

Significance and key roles played by geographical names may be explored in several areas:

- Role of geographical names in developing and strengthening political ties at regional and international levels;
- Role of geographical names in extending trades and economic transactions;
- Role of geographical names in enhancing academic and research collaborations;
- Role of geographical names in growth of tourism;
- Role of geographical names in development of national and regional infrastructures;
- Role of geographical names in recognizing identity of significant places and features in different countries;
- Role of geographical names in promoting common cultural and social characteristics;
- Role of geographical names in improving national and regional security.

A report on Asia South-West Division (other than Arabic) activities since 2007

Data on geographical names are among the essential elements in creating a spatial data infrastructure (SDI). Cooperation of Asia South West Division (ASWD) members in academic and technical areas for standardization of geographical names and use of standardized names can play a significant role in implementation and development a regional spatial data infrastructure. Thus, extended regional cooperation in this area will be significantly important in economic development and progress of the region. Based on this view, the Islamic Republic of Iran, as chair of ASWD, makes its best efforts to promote the culture for producing, recording, and consistent publishing of correct geographical names in the region. So far, numerous measures have been adopted to make progress in standardization of geographical names at the regional level. Here, major activities that took place in this area from 2007 are reviewed:

1- Regional meetings of Asia South-West Division (other than Arabic)

In addition to Asia South-West Division (ASWD) meetings usually held as side events at United Nations conferences and sessions, other regional meetings have been held in Iran as well. In such meetings, delegates of member states present what their respective countries have done and discuss challenges in standardization of geographical names. Furthermore, practical methods and mechanisms for standardization of geographical names and follow-ups for implementation of UNGEGN recommendations and approvals in the region are always among other issues considered in agendas for these regional meetings.

To this end, the 8th Regional Meeting of ASWD was held on May 13 and 14, 2008 in Iran. Delegates of five member states, namely Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Pakistan, and Turkey, were present at this meeting.

The 9th Regional Meeting of ASWD was held on February 28 and March 1, 2011 in Tehran. Delegates from Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Pakistan, and Turkey were present at the meeting while representatives of embassies of Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan in Tehran participated in the sessions as observers.

Side events, such as tours and workshops, were held at these regional meetings. Detailed reports on these divisional sessions were presented at previous UNGEGN sessions.

2- Following up regional activities at side events of the 1st Meeting of ECO Heads of Surveying and Mapping Organizations

The 1st Meeting of ECO (Economic Cooperation Organization) Heads of Surveying and Mapping Organizations was held on September 26 and 27, 2011 in Tehran.

Since Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Turkmenistan are member states of ASWD-UNEGN, delegates of these countries were met separately at side meetings where measures on standardization of geographical names, particularly implementation of decisions made at the 9th regional meetings in Tehran, were discussed.

3- Training workshops for Afghan experts

In regard to academic collaborations between Asia South-West Division (ASWD) member states, National Cartographic Center (NCC) of Iran organized a training course for experts from Afghan Geodesy and Cartography Head Office. The workshop, “Establishment of Regional Geographical Names Database”, was held for four days in Tehran starting from April 23, 2012, hosting four members of Afghan Board on Geographic Names. The topic included the followings:

- The concepts in standardization of geographical names;
- Terminology of geographical names;
- Geographical names and cartography;
- Description of tables used in regional geographical names database;
- Classification of geographical features;
- Field works for collecting geographical names;
- Office treatments in registering geographical names (conventional and digital methods);
- Iranian National Geographical Names Database;
- Persian Romanization System;
- Administrative divisions data in Geographic Information Systems (GIS);
- Creating database and data entering.

In addition to theoretical training, the participants received practical training on how to gather and store geographical names.

4- Unofficial meeting with Azerbaijani delegate in Asia South-West Division (other than Arabic)

The 2nd International Conference and Exhibition on Mapping and Spatial Information was held by National Cartographic Center on May 7 to 9, 2012, in Tehran. The conference hosted guests from other countries, including a delegate of State Land & Cartography Committee of Azerbaijan Republic.

Since this delegate represented Azerbaijan in regional meetings of Asia South-West Division (ASWD), some members of Iranian Committee on the Standardization of Geographical Names met with the Azerbaijan's delegate in an unofficial meeting on May 8, 2012. In addition issues related to establishment of regional geographical names database, different other subjects such as the need for attendance of ASWD member states in the 10th United Nations Conference on Standardization of Geographical Names and preparing a list of major cities names for completing UNGEGN multilingual geographical names database, were discussed.