

Third United Nations Conference on the  
Standardization of Geographical Names  
Athens, 17 August-7 September 1977

A D D R E S S

by

Professor L.N. Mavridis  
President of the Conference

Honourable National Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all I would like to express to the honourable national delegates my gratitude for the great honour they have bestowed upon me by electing me President of the Third United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

I wish to assure all of them that I appreciate very much the significance of this election and I will try to do my best in order to fulfil my presidential duties in the most satisfactory way for all of you.

A steadily increasing number of scientists are adopting in recent years the viewpoint according to which our domicile, the Earth, is nothing else but a large space-ship travelling along its orbit in space with its passengers and crew, i.e., the peoples of the world and their leadership and a certain amount of supplies, our natural resources. It is, therefore, up to us to secure the harmless continuation of this marvellous space-travel.

If this picture is true, as the present speaker is inclined to believe, then it is obvious that a necessary condition in order to secure the smooth continuation of our space-travel is to introduce the soonest possible a generally acceptable system for naming the various parts and characteristic points of our space-ship in order to facilitate the mutual understanding of the passengers and crew, in other words to achieve the SGN.

Significant progress has been made so far in the field of SGN. This can be easily seen by studying the proceedings of both the First and the Second UNCISGN as well as the reports of the sixth session of the UNCEGN, held so far under the auspices of the Transport and Cartography Branch, Centre of Natural Resources, Energy and Transport, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Economic and Social Council. And this progress was of course neither accidental nor easy. It was achieved thanks to the hard and systematic work of all the members of the UNCEGN, who prepared the work of the First and Second UNCISGN and secured the implementation of their recommendations as well as thanks to the parallel efforts of the participants and especially of the officers of the First and Second UNCISGN. It is, therefore, an agreeable duty for me to use this opportunity in order to express our gratitude to Mr. M.F. Burrill (United States of America), President of the First UNCISGN and Mr. H.A.G. Lewis (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) President of the Second UNCISGN, as well as to Mr. C. N. Christopher, Executive Secretary of both Conferences, for their valuable contributions.

The problems, however, related to the SGN are neither few nor easy to solve. Ten thousand years of human history on the Planet Earth have accumulated together with the marvellous monuments and the numerous other benefits of civilization, for which all of us feel very proud, also a heavy inheritance in the field of GN, which is a significant obstacle to any effort of SGN. Furthermore, the spectacular development of space research has opened wide new possibilities in the field of mapping the Moon and the Planets, thus giving rise to the fairly complicated problems of Planetary System Nomenclature. It is, therefore, not surprising to state that in spite of the great progress made so far there are still a lot of problems in the field of SGN awaiting their solution. An examination of the resolutions adopted during the Second UNCSGN gives among others the following problems, which await their solution by the present Conference:

- (1) Further development of more efficient methods for the field collection and office treatment of GN. Dissemination of these methods to all countries through the organization of training courses, the exchange of visits of experts and the organization of regional meetings.
- (2) Adoption of Romanization systems for each of the remaining non-Roman writing systems.
- (3) Publication of a list of exonyms used by the various national geographical names authorities and further efforts to reduce their use as far as possible and as quickly as possible.
- (4) Improvement in current practices and procedures concerning the delimitation and naming of oceans and seas, including their integral sub-divisions beyond the limits of national jurisdiction.
- (5) Elaboration of an international convention or any other international document determining the rules and procedures for the naming, re-naming and designating of geographical features beyond a single sovereignty of geographical features which are under the sovereignty of more than one country or are divided among two or more countries, of undersea features and Antarctic geographical entities as well as of extraterrestrial geographical features.

I am certain that with the help of the excellent preparatory work carried out by the UNCEGN, under the Chairmanship of Mr. M.F. Burrill, since the Second UNCSGN most of these problems will find the way to their solution during our Conference.

Especially, I would like to draw the attention of the participants of the Conference to the urgent problem of the standardization of names of topographical features on the Moon and the Planets.

Thanks to the spectacular progress made in recent years in the field of space exploration, especially by the USA and the USSR, tens of thousands of new topographical features have been already identified or will be soon identified on the surface of the Moon and the Planets and are awaiting their names.

The Working Group on Planetary System Nomenclature of the International Astronomical Union, under the Chairmanship of Mr. P. Millman and the recently established Advisory Committee on Extraterrestrial Feature Names of BGN under the Chairmanship of Mr. W.E. Brunk have certainly done so far an excellent job in this respect.

The problem of Planetary System Nomenclature, however, as an essential part of the wider problem of Space Exploration is, in the opinion of the present speaker, a too precious undertaking to be left at the discretion of any group of experts of either the International Astronomical Union or any other scientific organization.

It is, therefore, my hope that some action could be taken during our Conference which would make it possible for all the nations of the world to take an active part in the procedures of naming extraterrestrial topographical features.

With these thoughts in mind, I would like to take over the chair and I wish to all of you a fruitful participation in the Conference and a nice stay in the country where Science and Democracy were born.