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Item 15 (b) of the provisional agenda.  
Writing systems: (b) Writing of  
names from unwritten languages

A NEW INUIT ORTHOGRAPHY FOR GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES\*

Paper presented by Canada

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\* Paper prepared by Mr. Stevenson, federal co-ordinator on the Inuit Language Commission. He also represents the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development on the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names.

A NEW INUIT ORTHOGRAPHY FOR GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES\*

(Paper presented by Canada)

Prior to 1967 the spelling of geographical names of Inuit origin was done in a rather haphazard fashion. At its annual meeting that year the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names<sup>1</sup> agreed to use a new standard orthography devised by linguists in the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development for all new names of Inuit origin. It was also agreed that established names should not be changed although they may not reflect the recommended orthographic forms.

The standard Inuit orthography appeared reasonably satisfactory for use in both English and French texts, and for use in gazetteers and on maps. However, the Inuit themselves expressed reservations about the suitability of the orthography for all its language dialects. In 1974 the Inuit Tapirisat (National Inuit Brotherhood) which had been established three years earlier to serve the needs of the Inuit across Canada, asked the Federal Government to establish a language commission to investigate the status and various aspects of the Inuit language.

The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development was sympathetic to the proposal and made available the requested funds to the Brotherhood. He also seconded from his department a federal co-ordinator. The Brotherhood appointed the six Inuit commissioners, the Inuit director and the three-man advisory committee made up of authorities on the Inuit language. The commissioners visited the 50 or so communities in the north to record the views of the Inuit people. Tape recorders were used to make a record of the comments and, as well, to convey the difference among dialects to the various communities. The Commission also worked with the CBC Northern Service, the community councils and others interested in the language of the Inuit.

On completion of the Commission's fact-finding tour the following conclusions were drawn:

(a) There is no doubt that the Inuit Language can survive. For the majority of the Inuit, no matter what age they are, it is still the preferred tongue. There is general alarm, however, at the threats to it from the powerful southern culture that is moving into the north, and fears that the Inuit language might be supplanted. But the optimistic view is that it can survive if certain actions are taken. It is evident that language, like gold, is merely a tool but that languages and culture are inseparable. Common speech is one of the strongest human bonds and it is therefore a common language which above all unites the Inuit.

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(b) It was recognized that a common system of writing was desirable. For one thing, the actual number of Inuit in Canada is small and without a common system they would be cut off, not only from each other but from their fellow Inuit across the Arctic from Siberia to Greenland. It was feared that the language might tend to disappear unless the Inuit themselves showed real interest and took definite steps to preserve it. They might then produce material in their own language and make contributions to literature, communications and culture that would survive the pressures from the south.

(c) At one time the Inuit had no written language of their own. By attempts and various influences mainly by missionaries, the language was put into writing. Unfortunately the Inuit ended up using different writing systems depending on the region. The Commission had originally planned to develop a single writing system but resistance was met from many Inuit who could only read either in Roman or Syllabics.

Based on these conclusions the Commission made the following recommendation:

A single standardized Inuit orthography should be developed, but with a dual form of expression, both in Syllabics and Roman characters.

In accordance with the recommendation a dual Inuit language system was developed by the Orthography Committee and ratified by the Commission. In practice the resulting form of writing includes a slightly modified version of the syllabic system used in Baffin, Keewatin and Arctic Quebec regions and a standardized Roman orthography currently used in the Western Arctic and Labrador. A number of symbols considered redundant have been eliminated and one new symbol thought necessary to accurately represent a distinctive sound in certain regional dialects has been included. The dual orthographies have been arranged so as to reconcile the syllabic and Roman systems by achieving a high degree of transferability between the two, meaning that each syllabic symbol has its invariable equivalent in a cluster of Roman characters.

The implementation process of the dual systems as one of the Commission's recommendations supported by the federal territorial governments is now with the Inuit Cultural Institute, an arm of Inuit Tapirisat of Canada at Eskimo Point, N.W.T. This is considered the appropriate organization to oversee any ongoing work of the Commission and the recommendations. Here, not only will steps be taken to safeguard the Inuit language, but necessary material will be developed to be used in the teaching of language courses to both children and adults. Also steps will be taken to use more fully the various media such as radio and television.

With this development of the dual orthographies, it should facilitate the writing and spelling of Inuit toponyms and eliminate much of the confusion and distortion of the Inuit names.

A NEW INUIT ORTHOGRAPHY FOR  
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

The following geographical names are selected to illustrate the new orthography in both Syllabics and Roman orthography. It is not proposed at this time that any of the established geographical names will be officially changed to the new orthography. It will, however, be used for new name proposals or for other communications among the Inuit.

ESTABLISHED NAME WITH INUIT NAME IN FORMER ORTHOGRAPHY	SYLLABICS	NEW ROMAN ORTHOGRAPHY
Eskimo Point (Arvia)	ᑲᖅ ᓅᑲ	Arvia
Whale Cove (Tikirakjuak)	ᑎᑲᑲᑲ ᑲᑲᑲᑲ	Tikirajuaq
Chesterfield Inlet (Iglooligajuk)	ᑲᑲ ᓅᑲ ᑲᑲ ᑲᑲ	Igluligaarjuk
Baker Lake (Kamanituak)	ᑲᑲᑲᑲ ᑲᑲᑲᑲ	Qamanittuaq
Coral Harbour (Salik)	ᑲᑲ ᑲᑲ	Salliq
Frobisher Bay (Ekaluit)	ᑲᑲᑲᑲ ᑲᑲᑲᑲ	Iqaluit
Gjoa Haven (Ursuktuk)	ᑲᑲᑲᑲ ᑲᑲᑲᑲ	Ursuqtuuq
Cape Dorset (Kingaet)	ᑲᑲᑲᑲ ᑲᑲᑲᑲ	Kinngait
Pangnirtung	ᑲᑲ ᑲᑲ ᑲᑲᑲᑲ	Pangniqtuuq
Repulse Bay (Naujat)	ᑲᑲᑲᑲ ᑲᑲᑲᑲ	Naujaat
Belcher Islands (Sanikiluak)	ᑲᑲ ᑲᑲ ᑲᑲᑲᑲ	Sanikiluag
Tuktoyaktuk	ᑲᑲ ᑲᑲᑲᑲ ᑲᑲᑲᑲ	Tuktuujaaqtuq
Inuvik	ᑲᑲᑲᑲ ᑲᑲᑲᑲ	Inuuvik
Igloolik	ᑲᑲ ᓅᑲᑲᑲ	Iglulik
Povungnituk	ᑲᑲᑲᑲ ᑲᑲᑲᑲ	Puvirngniqtuuq
Inoudjouac	ᑲᑲᑲᑲ ᑲᑲᑲᑲ	Inukjuaq
Fort Chimo (Kutjoak)	ᑲᑲᑲ ᑲᑲᑲᑲ	Kuutjuaq
Great Whale River (Kutjoarapik)	ᑲᑲᑲ ᑲᑲᑲᑲᑲᑲ	Kuutjuaraapik

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