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Use of the five-letter alphabetic code system for purposes
of international trade**

Paper presented by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

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At its twelfth session, in September 1980, the Working Party on Facilitation of International Trade Procedures, a subsidiary organ of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, adopted Recommendation No.16: LOCODE, Codes for Ports and other locations, which recommends that the five-letter alphabetic code system be used for purposes of international trade to designate location whenever there is a need for a coded alphabetical designation for representing the name of ports, airports, inland freight terminals and other locations where Customs clearance of goods can take place, or otherwise proposed by Governments.

The identification of a particular location is frequently required in information interchange in international trade and transport, to direct the movement of goods - e.g. in addresses, in shipping marks, and in data elements identifying ports of call, ports or places of loading or unloading, ports or places of transshipment and destination, places of clearance by Customs, etc.

The names of such locations are often spelt in different ways and sometimes the same location is designated by different names in various languages (e.g. LIVORNO - LIBOURNE - LEGHORN; LONDON - LONDRES - LONDRA; WARSAW - VARSOVIE - WARSZAWA - WARSCHAU), which creates confusion and difficulties in data exchange. The identification in a unique and unambiguous way of any place involved in international trade is therefore an essential element for the facilitation of trade procedures and documentation. This can be achieved by using agreed, unique coded designations for such locations; this would have the added advantage of permitting an exchange of data in a more economical way.

In accordance with the Recommendation a code designation given to each location consists of:

two letters identifying the country according to the ISO 3166 ALPHA-2 Code for the representation of names of countries, and UN/ECE/FAL Recommendation No.3; and

three letters identifying the location within the country. These three letters are either:

- obtained from the IATA List of Location Identifiers; or
- obtained from the Government concerned; or
- selected by the secretariat in accordance with the principles laid down in the Recommendation.

The codes can be extended by the addition of further characters to indicate subsidiary locations, such as areas of a port, different railway stations at the same location, or terminals at the same airport, etc. Such code extensions would be optional at the discretion of Governments or local authorities concerned. However, if notified to the secretariat, they will be incorporated in the data record for the locations in question; they could be made available to interested parties on request.

Some classifier functions which might be needed for particular applications in various user environments will be incorporated in the data record maintained by the secretariat but will not normally be shown in the printed-out code list. However, because of their more common nature, those indicating category, geographical area and status will be shown after the location code itself.

The presentation of the code list will be in the form of a computer or word-processor print-out, normally including all categories of locations listed alphabetically within each country. It will, however, be possible to print out all locations of one category, e.g. maritime ports, in a separate listing, or to group locations in one country according to functions. There is also a possibility of grouping location by geographical region or sub-region by aggregation of countries, or of maritime ports in geographical areas.

Annexes to the main list will include the codes for geographical area and for particular status.

The code list can be made available in the form of print-out on paper and on other data media, such as magnetic tape and punch cards. The secretariat should be contacted in order to obtain information on technical and other conditions under which such media can be procured.

It should be stressed that, although this code is intended to cover airports, inland freight terminals, maritime ports and other locations, for purposes of international trade data interchange, it is recognized that the coverage may not be complete for all applications, and that codes for entities which may not be of interest in international trade might be needed for domestic purposes in conjunction with the international code. Although such additional entities might not be included in the published code list, they may be included in the records and codes reserved as appropriate, in consultation with Governments and international bodies concerned, as part of the envisaged updating and maintenance procedures. It is also recognized that users might wish to make a selection of relevant entities from the published list, and that abridged versions might be established for particular applications.

Delegations from twenty-four countries, from all five continents, and from twelve international organizations played an active part in the elaboration of this code.

Major contributions towards the establishment of the entity list were made by the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS), the International Association of Ports and Harbours (IAPH), the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA), and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). In addition, the secretariat had full access to the list of airports and other locations maintained by the International Air Transport Association (IATA).
