

**Ninth United Nations Conference on the
Standardization of Geographical Names**

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Item 4 of the provisional agenda*

**Reports by Governments on the situation in their countries
and on the progress made in the standardization of
geographical names since the Eighth Conference**

**Report on the progress in standardization of geographical names and the
challenges that face it in this context**

Submitted by Syria **

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Syrian report on the progress in standardization of geographical names and the challenges that face it in this context

Since the first UN conference on standardization on geographical names held in Geneva 1967, Syria has given great interest to the standardization of its geographical name and formed a national commission to follow this issue at the national level, and established the Public Institution of Surveying responsible of following up all national Syrian activities related to Standardization of geographical names and its Romanization. Furthermore, Syria contributed to the creation of Beirut Paper with other Arab states during the First Arab Conference on Geographical Names in 1971, and later enhanced the status of the paper at the Second Arab Conference in Tripoli, Libya in 2004. The Arab states have also adopted the Standard Arabic System for Transliteration of Geographical Names during the Third Arab Conference in Beirut, May 2007.

Syrian national experts on geographical naming have made many maps of Syrian Arab Republic in which all the names are romanized based on Beirut Paper and its modifications. For example, a Syrian map with Romanized names was completed recently on the scale of 1/1000000. In addition to that, many tourist maps of the Syrian Cities are completed. For instance, a map for the capital “Damascus” was accomplished recently on the scale of 1/10000. It demonstrates all roads, streets, archeological sites and hotels in Damascus.

Challenges and Difficulties faced by Syria

Syria faces challenges and difficulties in implementing its policies on standardization of its geographical names and its romanization. These challenges and difficulties resulted from the continuation of Israeli occupation to the Syrian Golan since 1967 and from the Israeli practices and policies to change entirely its geographical features and their names. Same can be said on occupied Palestinian territories. Israel the occupying power has given different Hebraic names to the Syrian and Palestinian geographical features for political and settlement goals. These Hebraic names are completely different from the original names

of these features, which were known before the Israeli occupation. This practices and policies are part of a comprehensive Judaization process to the names of geographical features including cities, villages, rivers, streets and archeological sites to use the new Hebraic names in maps, books and daily life. The purpose of this policy is to create a new geographical environment which distorts the facts and counterfeits the geographical features of the occupied territories and their names. Israel has also been promoting these names at the international level as original names to be used by other states in the various areas such as tourism, maps and education. Therefore, these geographical features have lost its original names which have been known prior to the Israeli occupation.

Syria believes that the principle of determining geographical names in terms of form and articulation is related completely to national sovereignty and is a sound principal only in areas that have been politically stable for a long time. However, there is a problem in cases of tentative sovereignty change resulting from foreign occupation, as we have explained earlier. This case has to be dealt with through adopting a process in the framework of the international norms endorsed by UN in which the geographical names of territories under foreign occupation are protected. We'd like to recall, in this context, the resolution number 16 of the third United Nations Conference on Standardization of Geographical Names which recommends that "to recommendation A of resolution 4 of the First United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names should be added the following: It is recommended that any changes made by other authorities in the names standardized by the competent national geographical names authority should not be recognized by the United Nations".

The local names of geographical features before falling under foreign occupation can not be considered as exonyms simply because the occupying power that controls these features sees it this way. It is unacceptable to consider the national local names for geographical features under foreign occupation as exonyms based on the unjust principal, which says that the speakers of these local names have become a minority compared to the majority. This majority consists of foreign settlers whom the occupation power imported from abroad to

settle illegally in the occupied territories owned by others and fall under the rules of international law, particularly the Geneva Convention of 1948. It is not advisable to involve religious issues in the standardization of geographical names and consider the Bible as geographical reference and exploiting its religious teachings to distort and change the original local names of the occupied territories and consider them as exonyms.

The abovementioned ideas lead us to recognize that the credibility of the exonyms recommended by the occupying power, whatever this occupying power is. This situation applies to local geographical names of the occupied Syrian Golan and the occupied Palestinian territories.