

**Group of Experts on
Geographical Names**

**Eleventh Session
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WORKING PAPER

No. 21

Item No.9 of the
Provisional Agenda*

AIDS TO NAME-PRONUNCIATION

(Submitted by the Dutch-and
German-speaking Division.
Prepared by D. Blok)

* WP No. I

Item No.9 of the Provisional Agenda of the 11th Session of the U.N. Group of Experts on Geographical Names goes back to Resolution No.7 of the Third United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (Report, Vol.I, p.27; cf. p.22 par.83), which reads as follows:

"The Conference,

Noting that the transfer of names from one writing system into another would be facilitated by information on pronunciation,

Recognizing the practical difficulty of indicating precise pronunciations but the feasibility of providing indications of approximate pronunciations adequate for comprehension in the receiver script,

Recommends that the Group of Experts consider the nature and design of research and experimentation that may help to establish the ranges of comprehensible pronunciation."

In linking this problem directly with the process of transcription, this Resolution tends to work against international standardization. As a matter of fact, the transfer of names from one writing system into another ought to be done according to a transcription key established either by the donor country or - failing that - worked out by specialists of the receiver country or countries, who are familiar with the languages involved. In both cases there is no need for the users to take the pronunciation of the characters of the original script into consideration; they only have to apply the transcription key.

If, on the other hand, each individual cartographer, journalist or other user is going to experiment in transferring names on the basis of his knowledge of the approximate pronunciation of the characters of the original, the result will be a chaos. Not only will each language have its own transcription of the original, but within most languages different transcriptions may emerge according to dialectal and sociolectal differences. Resolution No.7 of the Third Conference as it reads now is unworkable.