

UNITED NATIONS

Group of Experts on
Geographical Names

Fourteenth Session
Geneva, 17-26 May 1989

WORKING PAPER

No.86 (Part I)
25 May 1989

Agenda item 18

DRAFT REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS GROUP OF EXPERTS ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES ON THE WORK OF ITS FOURTEENTH SESSION

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. In pursuance of Economic and Social Council resolution 1314(XLIV) of 31 May 1968, the Secretary-General invited the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) to convene its fourteenth session at the United Nations Office at Geneva from 17-26 May 1989.

ATTENDANCE

2. The session was attended by 71 participants from 36 countries, representing 17 of the 19 geographical/linguistic divisions of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names. In addition, _____ intergovernmental and international scientific organizations were represented. The list of participants is reproduced in Annex I below.

3. Mr. M. de Henseler, Chief of the Cartography Unit, Natural Resources and Energy Division of the Department of Technical Co-operation of the United Nations Secretariat, served as Secretary of the Group.

OPENING OF THE SESSION

4. The session was opened by the Chairman, Mr. H. Dorion (Canada). He was assisted by the Vice-Chairman, Mr. A. Tazi (Morocco) and the Rapporteur, Mr. P.J. Woodman (United Kingdom).

AGENDA

5. The Group adopted the following agenda:

1. Opening of the session
2. Adoption of the agenda
3. Report of the Chairman
4. Report of the Secretary
5. Reports of the Divisions and Liaison Officers
6. Reports of the working groups
 - (a) Working Group on Toponymic Data Files
 - (b) Working Group on Courses in Applied Toponymy
 - (c) Working Group on a single Romanization System
 - (d) Ad Hoc Working Group on Evaluation
7. United Nations Regional Cartographic Conferences
8. Implementation programme (means to ensure a greater impact of the work done by the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names and the UNGEGN on other international organizations, government agencies, private enterprises and the media)
9. Regional Conferences and Co-operation
10. UNGEGN Newsletter
11. Exonyms
 - (a) Standardization in multilingual areas
12. Terminology
13. Concise National Gazetteers
14. Toponymic Guidelines
15. Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names
16. Fifteenth Session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names
17. Other matters
18. Adoption of the Report

REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN

6. The Chairman of the Group noted the particular importance of this session, aimed at identifying specific ways of translating into reality the principles, guidelines and methods which the Group had formulated at previous sessions. The Group should consider particularly the problems faced by countries not present at this session. Financial and organizational problems precluded their attendance, and the Group should identify ways in which the results of its work could be communicated to such countries. It was, indeed, one of the basic elements of the Group's mandate that assistance should be given to developing countries. The Group should actively consider how to resolve the fact that, despite the existence since the 1960s of United Nations structures to promote the cause of standardization of geographical names, many countries were still not applying many of the conference resolutions.

7. The Chairman remarked that interesting progress had been made since the Fifth Conference in 1987. In particular, the Group's Newsletter had proved to be a great success. Three had appeared so far, and consideration should perhaps be given to disseminating them more widely. It was pleasing to note that countries such as Nigeria, Gabon, China and the USSR were being active in the creation of national toponymic authorities. The United Kingdom, Czechoslovakia, Canada and other countries, as well as the International Hydrographic Bureau, had produced important gazetteers since 1987. Similar work was currently being undertaken by Ireland, Israel, Morocco, China and Indonesia. Since 1987, toponymic training courses had been held in Panama, Quebec and Ecuador. More such courses would be desirable; the direct personal contacts they established were important in assisting organizational contacts later. Other relevant courses, run by cartographic organizations or universities, were available in the USA, Canada, Finland, Norway and Israel. As far as the reduction of exonyms was concerned, France, Spain, Romania and Poland were producing revised lists. A multilingual list of country names had been published in Finland, and Czechoslovakia was also preparing a list of country names in Czech and Slovak.

8. The Chairman noted that the success of many of these undertakings had depended on co-operation with organizations such as the International Council of Onomastic Sciences (ICOS) and the Pan-American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH). Such co-operation, along with the various bilateral and multilateral meetings which had taken place since 1987, played an invaluable role in disseminating knowledge of the Group's activities.

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY

9. After introducing his new deputy, Mr. Valery Moskalenko, the Secretary informed the session of a decision taken in May 1988 by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). This decision had endorsed the recommendation to convene the Sixth Conference in 1992, requested the implementation of the Fifth Conference resolutions, and approved the statute and rules of procedure of the UNGEGN.

10. The Secretary reported on developments since 1987 in which the United Nations had had a direct involvement. Apart from the six-monthly Newsletter (see para. ____), the manual entitled "Organization and function of a national geographical names standardization programme" would shortly be published in Volume XX of "World Cartography". A successful training course in toponymy for French-speaking countries had been held in Quebec in August 1988 (see para ____). In January 1989, the Fourth UN Regional Cartographic Conference for the Americas had adopted three resolutions pertaining to geographical names (see para. ____).

REPORTS OF THE DIVISIONS AND LIAISON OFFICERS

Africa Central Division

11 Mr. Mbika-Mbonguila reported that the Gabonese Council of Ministers had just passed a decree establishing a National Toponymic Commission in Gabon. In part, this welcome development resulted from Gabon's participation in the toponymic training course held in Quebec in 1988 (see para. ____). Mr. Mbika-Mbonguila expressed his thanks to all those concerned with the organization of the course. He also undertook to encourage other countries of the geographical/linguistic division to consider seriously the question of national standardization (see Working Paper No.77).

Africa East Division

12. Mr. Njuki reported that he had disseminated a report of the work and resolutions of the Fifth Conference to the other countries in the division. Of these, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe had replied, expressing an interest in studying and implementing the applicable resolutions of that Conference. Noting resolution 21 of that Conference, Mr. Njuki informed the session that his country, Kenya, would be very interested in hosting a toponymic training course if financial support from the United Nations were forthcoming (see para. ____).

Arabic Division

13. Mr. Tazi informed the session that every effort was being made in Morocco to preserve and standardize geographical names, which constituted part of the national patrimony. It was necessary to find means of making people aware of the importance of toponymy. To achieve this, co-operation with universities in Morocco was being encouraged. A geographical/historical dictionary of Moroccan towns was being prepared and a regional Arabic Centre, to deal with cartography and associated subjects, was being established.

14. Mr. Tazi reported that the training course held in Quebec (see para ____) had been of great benefit to those African countries which had participated. He felt that the course had benefited from the experience of previous courses, such as that held in Rabat in 1985. Partly as a result of the course in Quebec, Morocco was now considering the automated processing of names to create a national database. Furthermore, Morocco and its Maghreb neighbours had co-operated towards achieving a final decision on a uniform romanization system for Arabic (see para ____). There would be a further meeting towards the end of 1989 which would finalise this matter.

Asia East Division (other than China)

15. It was reported that no divisional meetings had taken place since the Fifth Conference.

Asia South-East and Pacific South-West Division

16. It was reported that the parallel political and physical editions of the map of the division at the scale of 1:6 million, already published and distributed several years ago, remained current. A second toponymic training course in Indonesia was planned for later in 1989. Thailand had hosted a meeting of the division in September 1988, at which Australia had become a divisional member (see Working Paper No.75).

Asia South-West Division (other than Arabic)

17. It was reported that a divisional meeting had recently taken place which had discussed possible modifications for the romanization system for Farsi agreed at the First Conference. Further divisional consultations would take place and the results would be reported to the next session of the UNGEGN. Mr. Lewis expressed the hope that the division would not seek any amendment to the previously agreed system. The United Kingdom was willing to co-operate in discussing this matter.

Celtic Division

18. Mr. O Maolfabhail noted that Ireland was the principal representative of the Celtic group of languages, but that other countries such as the United Kingdom also contained languages of this group. Mr. Lewis replied that, of these languages in the United Kingdom, Cornish and Manx were extinct (see Working Paper No.80).

China Division

19 Mr. Wang informed the session that several important developments had taken place in China since the Fifth Conference (see Working Paper No.71). The secretariat of the China Committee on Geographical Names had been incorporated into the Ministry of Civil Affairs as part of a newly created Department of Administrative Divisions and Geographical Names Management. The general investigation into the standardization of place names was continuing, notably in Tibet, where experts from northern provinces were assisting. It was anticipated that field work and office treatment of Tibetan names would be accomplished by 1990, and that publication of a gazetteer would follow.

20. The China Committee on Geographical Names was conducting experiments to establish a uniform automated place name information storage and index system. The second volume (Zhejiang Province) of the dictionary of geographical names of the People's Republic of China had now been published. The China Society of Toponymy had been established in July 1988, divided into five special committees for theoretical toponymy, applied toponymy, place name textual research, place name management and foreign place names. Great importance was being attached to toponymic education, and an extensive programme in this field was being established at Nanjing University (see para. ____).

21. Mr. Lewis and the Chairman of the Group both reminded the Session that the above activities constituted an immense amount of work. The pinyin system was official throughout China, applying to Tibetan, Mongol and Uighur names as well as Chinese names.

Dutch and German-speaking Division

22. Mr. Spiess informed the session that Mr. Sievers would be replacing Mr. Böhme for the Federal Republic of Germany, and Mr. Ormeling Jr. had replaced Mr. Blok for the Netherlands. Mr. Spiess reported that Switzerland did not possess a national names authority (see Working Paper No.65). Responsibility for names was distributed among several regional organizations and six federal ministries. Four national languages were involved. Discussions would be taking place to ascertain whether there was a need for a national names authority and, if so, to establish its terms of reference.

23. It had been intended to translate into German the Glossary No.330 (Technical Terminology Employed in the Standardization of Geographical Names). However, it was felt that this Glossary required additions, deletions and revisions, so work on its translation had not commenced. The division would study a revised draft (see para. ____).

24. Mr. Raper informed the Session, with reference to Working Paper No.6, that the South African National Place Names Committee was fifty years old this year. Recently, orthographical rules relating to several African languages had been altered, and a revised list of approved geographical names would be published. Work on the national gazetteer had been suspended until all the names affected by the orthographical changes had been officially revised. Mr. Raper also mentioned South Africa's involvement in training in applied toponomy (see para. _____).

25. Mr. Haack reported that several important publications had been produced in the German Democratic Republic since the Fifth Conference (see Working Paper No.61). These included "Book of City Names of the GDR", which dealt with the origin and development of names from the linguistic aspect, and "Geographical Names - Short Explanations" which provided the meanings of 500 terms and 4,000 settlements and physical features. Apart from work concerning internal standardization, the German Democratic Republic had also published Guidelines for the spelling of names in Turkey, Italy and Sweden.

26. It was reported in connection with Working Paper No.72, that the Permanent Committee of Geographical Names of the Federal Republic of Germany was preparing a geographical gazetteer of the Americas for use in the German language area. It had also published a synoptic list of the names of states in German. The Committee had discussed the question of ways of delineating the extent of names applying to regional geographical features. It was keen to improve the distribution of information concerning names standardization to map editors. Mr. Sievers reported that the Institute for Applied Geodesy had published in 1988 the "Digital Name Data Base Antarctica" and a series of related photomaps. The Committee had assisted in the collection and verification of the names contained in this database.

East, Central and South-East Europe Division

27. Mr. Ficor, addressing Working Paper No.69, reported that a divisional meeting had been held in Czechoslovakia in March 1989. Many subjects had been discussed, including the implementation of Conference resolutions and the programme of work for the Group. Important standardization work was taking place in Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary and Poland. For example, Czechoslovakia had published lists of names for three districts and for the

East Mediterranean Division (other than Arabic)

28. Mr. Kadmon, introducing Working Paper No.3, reported on the Geographic Information Systems and the Toponymic Database in Israel (see para. _____), as well as on a survey of historical place names in Israel. On the latter subject, the Vice-Chairman urged that no attempt be made to alter names which had been known for centuries and which were recorded in ancient historical references. Mr. Kadmon assured the Session that every effort was being made to retain original names in their oldest form.

India Division

29. Mr. Lakshman reported that India was continuing its efforts on various activities called for by the Conferences. India was a multilingual country with fifteen official languages and hundreds of others. The Hunterian system of romanization had worked satisfactorily in the past, but the authorities were now seeking a greater degree of precision. To achieve this, names in each of the fifteen official languages were being converted to Hindi, the national language of India, before being romanized. It was important that pronunciation should be reflected in the standardized written form.

30. A national gazetteer of India was in preparation, as were inventories of names on a district or state basis. Names would be provided in the source language, in Hindi and in romanized form, together with a feature description and geographical co-ordinates. The political map of India at the scale of 1:4 million would shortly be published in the local languages of Kannada and Malayalam.

Norden Division

31. Introducing Working Paper No.70, Mrs. Närhi reported that this division had held a meeting in April 1989. Topics discussed had included problems in the usage of the Lappish orthography when automating names, ways of disseminating information concerning the work and recommendations of the UNGEGN, and the status of toponymic databases in the countries of the division. Efforts at field collection and national standardization of names

were continuing in all the countries. Amongst many other divisional activities, Sweden had input some 450,000 names into the toponymic database for the topographic map at the scale of 1:50,000. Mrs. Närhi informed the session that the next meeting of the International Council of Onomastic Sciences (ICOS) would be held in Helsinki in 1990.

Romano-Hellenic Division

32. It was reported that no divisional meeting had been held since the Fifth Conference, but that such a meeting would be held soon. Thanks were expressed to those concerned with the organization of the 1988 toponymic training course in Quebec.

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics Division

33. Mr. Dmitrocnkov reported that, since the Fifth Conference, the USSR had published four instructions on the rendering into Russian of various non-Russian geographical names, and seven dictionaries of geographical names relating to certain divisions of the USSR and to foreign countries (see Working Paper No.64). Considerable efforts were now being made in the USSR towards the restoration of many historical names of settlements and features within them. Mr. Dmitrocnkov announced that, following resolution 18 of the Fifth Conference, the GOST 1983 system was now used for geographical names in all romanized cartographic publications and timetables in the USSR. However, it was not so suited to telegraphic usage (see also para. _____).

United Kingdom Division

34. Mr. Lewis, introducing Working Paper No.66, reported on the increasing significance of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) in the countries of the division. He outlined large-scale work currently being undertaken by the Ordnance Survey of Great Britain, and announced that a revised edition of that organization's Gazetteer, based on the 1:50,000 scale map series, was to be published shortly. The Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland was also active in large-scale work, and had recently published a cultural map in bilingual (English and Irish) form, with a bilingual legend and gazetteer. For those names on this map relating to places and features outside Northern Ireland, the assistance of the Ordnance Survey in Dublin had been sought and provided.

35. Mr. Lewis informed the session that, although the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (PCGN) did not have the resources to provide training courses in toponymy, other organizations such as the Directorate of Military Survey and the Ordnance Survey did offer training in cartography and allied subjects. As far as national standardization was concerned, this was implemented through the official map series. Local usage determined the precise form of each name.

United States of America/Canada Division

36. Mr. Randall informed the session that the two countries of the division had reached agreement on principles and procedures on the common treatment of trans-boundary names. This agreement would help to eliminate several existing discrepancies (see Working Paper No.27 and para. ____). The United States Board on Geographic Names (BGN) had collaborated in training programmes with Thailand, Indonesia and the Pan-American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH; see para. 38). Eleven gazetteers of foreign areas had been published since the Fifth Conference, and the domestic State gazetteer programme continued to proceed very actively (see para. ____).

37. Recalling resolution 27 of the Fifth Conference, Mrs. Kerfoot noted the increasing importance of indigenous place names. The Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (CPCGN) was currently drafting a manual for the field recording of Inuit and Canadian Indian toponyms. The United States and Canada were co-operating in an increasing exchange of database information, for example in a programme to produce an international circumpolar map at the scale of 1:10 million.

Pan-American Institute of Geography and History

38. Mr. Randall introduced Working Paper No.25, which outlined the activities of the Pan-American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH) since the Fifth Conference. Two important toponymic training courses had been held, in Panama

in 1987 and in Quito in 1989. The Chairman of the Group of Experts and Mr. Randall had been among the instructors. Taken together, almost 30 students from 15 Latin American countries had attended. The basic elements of the courses had included the structure of national names authorities, field collection and office treatment of names, and consideration of gazetteer specifications. An important aspect of the courses was the degree of flexibility built into the teaching schedules (see para. ____). The Chairman noted that such courses offered a valuable mechanism for involving in toponymy people from countries which found it difficult to attend meetings of the Group of Experts.

International Hydrographic Organization

39. As liaison officer for the Group of Experts with the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO), Mr. Randall reminded the session of the guidelines adopted for the naming of undersea features. He introduced Working Paper No.45, which reported on the publication by the IHO of a gazetteer of undersea features shown on the General Bathymetric Chart of the Ocean (GEBCO: 1:10 million scale) and the IHO small-scale international chart series. Several countries had contributed to this by submitting names to the IHO for approval. The gazetteer gave the name of the feature (including both specific and generic term), the geographical co-ordinates, chart reference, and additional remarks where appropriate. About 2,000 names were included. It was agreed that the Group's liaison with IHO constituted a most useful collaboration with another international organization. Mr. Randall undertook to take to the IHO headquarters in Monaco a number of undersea names which had been submitted previously by Greece but apparently not yet considered by IHO.

Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization

40. Mr. Almoman reported that the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALESCO) attached great importance to its relationship with the Group of Experts and to the implementation of its recommendations. Training courses and the application of modern technology in the Arab countries were undertaken with the Group's recommendations in mind. Geographical names were very important, and Mr. Almoman recommended that the

United Nations Secretariat should seek means of financing symposia to draw attention to this. Following an ALESCO objection to one of the working papers at this session, the Chairman reminded the session of Rule 35 of the Group's Rules of Procedure.