



UNITED NATIONS  
ECONOMIC  
AND  
SOCIAL COUNCIL



Distr.  
LIMITED

E/CONF.53/L.25  
3 August 1967

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE  
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL  
NAMES

Geneva, 4-22 September 1967  
Item 7 of the provisional agenda

REPORTS BY GOVERNMENTS ON THE PROGRESS MADE IN THE  
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Submitted by the Government of Israel

The first Israel Government Geographical Names Committee was appointed by the Prime Minister in 1949 with the function of establishing Hebrew names for the Negev. The Committee revived biblical names for all the places, hills, valleys, springs, roads, etc., in Israel and various outstanding geographical features, as well as ancient Hebrew names. The Committee tried to find a Hebrew form for place names which survived in the Egyptian, Assyrian, Greek and Roman languages. Towards the end of 1950 the Committee published a list of geographical names in the Negev.

However, in March 1951, it was decided to appoint a government names committee for the whole country, whose decisions should be binding on all State and public institutions. In 1953 the Committee published the Gazetteer for the second sheet of the 1:250,000 map of Israel, and in 1955 it completed the fixing of names for all the geographical objects shown on the 1:250,000 map.

Three sub-committees had been formed with a view of making recommendations on new names and fixing old ones, viz: (a) Historical, (b) Geographical, (c) New settlements. These sub-committees, composed of experts in various branches, submit their recommendations and suggestions to the plenary meeting for its approval. In the last decade, much has been done towards the unification of names all over the map of Israel.

Throughout the period of its existence the Committee has laid down names for new villages and towns as the need arose; most of them had been taken from the Bible.

In 1958 the Committee approached the conclusion of the task of fixing names for all objects shown in the 1:100,000 map, and began the third stage of its work: names for the 1:20,000 map.

The Committee has also published a gazeteer of historic sites and a hydrographic gazeteer, although the Committee has added, up to now, about 7,000 names to the map.

There are twenty-one members on the Committee including outstanding geographers, historians, archaeologists, authors, etc. Dr. A. Biran, Director of the Department of Antiquities of Israel, is the Chairman of the Committee.

All the decisions taken by the Government Names Committee are published in "Reshumot", Israel's official Gazette.

The map does not contain any special sign for rivers, mountains, antiquities, etc., but only publishes the initials or full names of the items.

The transcription system is based upon the rules of transcription made by the Hebrew Academy. Outstanding biblical names are published as in the Bible, and not according to their pronunciation.

The transcription of non-Hebrew names into English is the same as was used during the mandatory régime in Israel.

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