

**Twenty-second Session  
New York, 20 -29 April 2004**

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**Item 5 of the Provisional Agenda**

**REPORT OF THE DIVISIONS**

**Activity on Geographical Names in Vietnam**

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\* Submitted by Vietnam

## **Country report Activity on Geographical names in Vietnam**

### **Introduction**

This report is an update of the country report of Vietnam since the Twenty first Session of the United Nation Group Experts on Geographical names held in Berlin, August 2002.

### **A status of geographical names in Vietnam**

Vietnam has 54 ethnic groups. The Vietnamese (Kinh or Viet) is a common official language of the country. 53 ethnic minorities in general speak Vietnamese in addition to their own language. They have a right to develop their own languages and scripts. At present there are 28 ethnic minorities have their own script system. Among them 15 using Latin alphabet, their structure of syllable looks like French, 13 another using non-Latin alphabet.

The present Vietnamese writing (national writing - as it is called in Vietnam) has been appeared at beginning of seventeenth century. The Vietnamese national writing is the writing to record a sound of voice based on Latin alphabet with system of diacritic marks, defined difference sound of the voice.

Due to the fact that Vietnam is multilingual country the problem of Standardization Geographical names is a large problem.

In Vietnam there is not a state organization which is specialized on standardization of geographical names and up to now there is not yet a National permanent Committee on Geographical Names. Research on Geographical names is carried out by several difference organizations and institutions, they have difference ways to deal with geographical names. Every organization/institute has raised it's own research and regulation for use of geographical names in compliance with their respective technical of view. Therefore, in many cases there is no uniform in fact in geographical names presented in the documents, even on the official documents of Central and Local Administrative Authorities, on the state public communication means. Differences of using geographical names could be seen in school books, on the maps printed by difference publishing houses and other documents

## **Activities on geographical names in Vietnam**

Since January 22, 2002 the Decree No 12/2002/ND-CP on state survey and mapping activities has issued by Vietnamese Government. This Decree has been assigned and stipulated the General Department of land Administration (GDLA) as an State Organization is responsible for use geographical names on the maps. In the same year 2002, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE) has been established by merging and reorganizing GDLA and some other relevant state bodies. Thus responsibility on geographical names has been mandated to the Department of Survey and Mapping (DOSM) of MONRE.

DOSM of MONRE is a National Mapping organization of Vietnam has been established in 2003. It has a function to assist Minister of MONRE in managing over survey and mapping activities; managing basic geodetic survey; organizing basic survey and mapping in inland, air space and territorial water of Vietnam. Although the responsibility for use of geographical names on the maps has just mandated by the Government to the National Mapping organization, the work in uniformity of use geographical names on the maps has been included in the survey mapping and land management activities rather long time ago in Vietnam as an ordinary work of National Mapping organization. Thus, there are several works have been completed by State Department of Geodesy and Cartography, GDLA (the former names of National Mapping Organization of Vietnam) for mapping purpose such as:

- Name's catalogue of cities, towns, sub-town, districts.
- Name's catalogue of communes in the country.
- Name's catalogue of main rivers and lakes in the countries.
- Name's catalogue of the capitals and big cities in the world, ect.

The Mapping organization of Vietnam has also issued direction and guidelines for settlement of typical matters in the field of geographical names for their use in survey and mapping in compliance with some provisional principles.

However, these catalogues and direction/guidelines were practically used only in survey and mapping activities of National Mapping organization and they were not updated from time to time, not systematically constructed. At the same time other organizations has their own regulation and guidelines on the use of geographical names. Therefore the Decree No 12/2002/ND-CP is an important

official legal document of Vietnam, which stipulates for uniformity of geographical names on the maps.

One year after establishment, DOSM has organized a group which is specialized on uniformity and standardization of geographical names used on the maps and it has been carried out several works in this respect. They are following:

Initiated with recognizing that the names of administrative units in the country were very disordered even when they are presented on the maps and other official documents; also recognizing that these names are very important in public use, DOSM has started with compiling gazetteer of administrative names. This Gazetteer is constructed in the form similar to the form used for gazetteer of geographical names of the countries in the Asia South East and Pacific South West Division of UNGEGN. But it contents more details than this form and can help the user to find out history of the feature's name, procedure of it's appearance and other relevant information, such as it's former names, traditional form of the name, other name, time on use, name of administrative unit of higher level to which it belongs, population of the administrative unit, coordinates of the administrative unit's centroid, ect.

There are 3 administrative levels in Vietnam: Province /city under central authority ; district, commune and the gazetteer is compiled for all levels. This gazetteer constructed in compliance with intention to build up a database of geographical names of Vietnam in future. So that it is linked to the digital administrative map of Vietnam at scale 1:1000000 and user can find out the position of the name on the map and other relevant information. The Gazetteer of administrative names of Vietnam will be completed by November 2004.

Also in this year 2004, DOSM is working out a project for building up other gazetteers. The project initiates with definition and formulation of guiding principles for standardization of geographical names. According to this project from 2005 to 2008 there will be issued the following gazetteers :

- Gazetteer of geographical names, used on the topographical maps of Vietnam. This gazetteer will be made step by step for several territorial parts of the country according to the linguistic and ethnic characters of the country.

- Gazetteer of geographical names used on the map of the world.

All of these gazetteers will be constructed in compliance with technical requirements of an oriented for the future database of geographical names of Vietnam, which will meet requirements of national standards of informational

technology and conform to the rules and principles of standardization of geographical names of UNGEGN. They will be also a base of National Gazetteer of Vietnam. Such a map and gazetteer will be made available electronically with the possibility of publishing on respective web sites. In the future the database of geographical names will be a part of the National System Database of infrastructure. An other important product of this project will be toponymic guidelines for map and other editors for international use and use in Vietnam.

Recently, as Vietnam is a member of the of Asia South East and Pacific South West Division of UNGEGN, according to the decision of Divisional meeting held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, October 2003, DOSM has carried out updating a portion of Vietnam on regional map, since it is now more than 7 years old and somewhat out of date. Beside of this DOSM has built up a concise gazetteer of geographical names of Vietnam with 201 main geographical names. All the task has completed by DOSM on 30 January 2004. The product consisted of an electronic file of the map of Vietnam at scale 1: 6000000 and a gazetteer in .PDF file has been sent to New Zealand - the country nominated to act as Project Coordinator for this work, for further processing.

In last few years, some researches on geographical names has been also carried out by some other institutions and organisation in Vietnam. These researches were mainly concentrated on study of languages of ethnic minorities in Vietnam, such as: basic survey on languages of ethnic minorities – carried out by Linguistic Institute of Vietnam from 1994 to 2000; Standardization of writing geographical names from dialectal names of the ethnic minorities into Vietnamese – carried out by Vietnamese Linguistic Association in 2001.

### **Conclusion**

There are many things of geographical names that MONRE of Vietnam in general and DOSM of MONRE in particular have to deal with. A necessary of a National permanent Committee on geographical names in Vietnam becomes more and more essential. To solve all relevant problems towards standardization of geographical names and perform a National Gazetteer we need to learn and follow the rules and principles of UNGEGN on standardization of geographical names. Presently Vietnam has not much experiences in standardization of geographical names, therefore we look forwards to having a support and assistance from United Nations and from experienced countries in this field, especially in toponymic training and organizing database of

geographical names. With these support and assistance we hope standardization of geographical names in Vietnam will be successful in a short time.