

**Twenty-third Session  
Vienna, 28 March – 4 April 2006**

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**Item 9 of the Provisional Agenda:  
Activities relating to the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology**

**Report of the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology**

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## **Report of the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology**

### **1. Background**

The Working Group on Terminology was set up by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names at its 15th session in Geneva in May 1989. The terms of reference for the Working Group were (1) to produce a new glossary of toponymic terminology, to replace U.N. Glossary No. 330, and (2) to periodically review and update the new glossary.

The Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (New York, 1992) expanded the scope of the activity of the Working Group and in resolution VI/11 recommended in para. 1(a) to produce the glossary as a multi-lingual publication in the six official languages of the United Nations, and in para. 3 “that the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology be asked to review the glossary periodically and update it as necessary”.

The Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (2002), in resolution VIII/3, once more recognized that terminology is not at a standstill, and that future developments will require additions and/or amendments to the definitions of terms,

Noting that the new *Glossary of Terms used in the Standardization of Geographical Names* was prepared by the Working Group on Terminology in the six official languages of the United Nations,;

Noting also that the *Glossary* has now been published,.....

1. Wishes to express its appreciation and thanks to the members of the Working Group on Terminology for having contributed their expertise and time on a personal and voluntary basis in compiling the *Glossary*;

2. Recommends that the Working Group on Terminology continue to function, with the aim of reviewing the Glossary periodically and updating it as required by a procedure to be agreed upon by the members of the Working Group.

### **2. New terms approved by the Working Group**

Since the last resolution concerning the Working Group on Terminology, adopted by the Eighth Conference (VIII/3, see above) the following terms and their definitions were discussed by the Working Group at its meeting on the occasion of the 22<sup>nd</sup> session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (2004) and approved for inclusion in the *Glossary*.

authorized name – *see* name, official.

standard name – *see* name, standardized.

geonym – *see* name, geographical

geoname – informal alternative for geographical name.

transboundary name – name of a geographical feature extending over two or more political entities.

ethnonym – in the definition of term No. 079, *eponym*, the last sentence should be amended as follows: “The corresponding term in French is *ethnonym* which, however, is applied only to a group of persons”.

Convenor now proposes to accept the ICOS definition (see below) and include the term ethnonym as an independent entry.

### 3. New terms proposed without definitions having been supplied

At the same meeting, the following terms were proposed but no definitions were received:

nominative form (of a toponym)

univocity

corrupted toponym

recycled toponym

anecdotal toponym

commemorative toponym

The last three terms were discussed by the Working Group, but the experts present did not consider this splitting of the term *toponym* necessary. For the first, convenor proposes the following definition:

nominative form (of a toponym) – in languages whose grammar includes declension and cases, the name form in the first (nominative) case. *Examples*: in German, Berlin (and not Berlins, *of* Berlin, genitive case); in Hungarian, Budapest (and not e.g. Budapestre, *to* Budapest); in Russian, Москва (and not e.g. Москва, *from* Moscow).

If no definitions for the terms *univocity* and *corrupted toponym* will be received, they will be deleted.

A further two terms that were proposed already in 2002 without a definition being supplied were *oikonym* and *anoikonym* [οἶκος = house in Greek; hence the prefix eco-]. In June 2004 the following note was received from Dr. Milan Harvalik (Czech Republic), originator/editor of the “List of Key Onomastic Terms” presented to the International Council of Onomastic Sciences” (ICOS) in Pisa, 2005.

“The term oikonym is – as far as I know – widely used especially by Slavonic and German onomasticians, and it is a synonym for ‘place name’ (in the meaning of name of populated place)... But there are some differences between particular usages [by different countries; *N.K.*].”

“The term anoikonym has been introduced by Slavonic onomasticians and nowadays is used by Czech onomasticians. ....The definition of anoikonym is ‘The names of non-residential [i.e. non-populated; *N.K.*] nature objects or the names of man-made, firmly fixed uninhabitable objects...i.e. names of bodies of water, terrain formations, pieces of land, and [lines of] communications.’”

In view of the fact that (a) the terms seem to be very much restricted in use in general onomastics, and (b) that they have been deleted in the above-mentioned “List of Key Onomastic Terms” – the convenor recommends not to include them in the *Glossary*.

#### 4. New terms proposed by the convenor

It is proposed to add the following terms, which have already been used in toponymy:

orononym – name of a vertically structured formation of the terrain (including the sea bed),  
e.g. names of mountains, mountain ranges, sea mounts, hills or highlands.

choronym – name of a large geographical or administrative unit of land. *Examples:*  
Yorkshire, Ar-Rub al-Khali, Missiones, Attika.

ethnonym – name of an ethnic group, such as a tribe, a clan, a nation. *Examples:* Danes,  
the Hashemites, Saami, the Sorbs.

lacustrine name – see name, lacustrine.

name, lacustrine – name of a lake or of an inland sea. *Examples:* Dead Sea, Ozero  
Balkhash, Lake Malawi.

Resulting from the onomastic term *onymisation*, i.e. changing a common noun into a proper name, the following is proposed:

toponymisation – the act of producing a toponym from a common noun. *Examples:*  
producing the toponym Bath (England), place of the Roman baths (bathum);  
Moulins (France) from moulin (mill); Iraq from ‘Iraq (Arabic, waterside of a sea  
or large river, or a pasture).

#### 5. The terms exonym, endonym and traditional name.

The Working Group on Exonyms has proposed new definitions for the terms “exonym” and “endonym, as follows:

exonym        name used in a specific language for a geographical feature situated outside the area where that language is spoken, and differing in its form from the name used in an official or well established language of the area where the geographical feature is located.

endonym       name of a geographical feature in an official or well established language occurring in that area where the feature is located.

Underlined are the main changes from the current accepted and published definitions. Perhaps significantly, no examples for the use of the new definitions were given, contrary to the official definitions in the *Glossary*. The total lack of examples was one of the reasons for the replacement of the manual *Technical Terminology Employed in the Standardization of Geographical Names*, or *Glossary No. 330* for short, edited by M. Stephane de Brommer (France) and produced in 1984 by the United Nations Secretariat; another was a reference in the definitions to western languages and Roman script only. This as well as some other objections led to the forming of the present working group on terminology.

A place name which is not an exonym is an endonym by default, so the above proposals would mean that many names in certain sovereign countries would be classified as endonyms – not in their own language but in the language of a foreign country! The former countries probably would not welcome this or would even object to this on historical-political grounds. Defining such toponyms as traditional names would solve the problem (see below).

Let us look at a specific example which shows that these definitions are unsatisfactory. Thus, English is quite widely spoken and well established in Israel but not official, so the above proposed new definition of an endonym would make “Jerusalem” an endonym which it is not, this being Yerushalayim (Hebrew) and Al- Quds (Arabic). The same would apply to the Greek “Hierosolyma” (there being e.g. a Greek Colony in Jerusalem). Conversely, “Jerusalem” which does not differ in its form from the name in this “well established” (English) language would therefore not be an English exonym and thus, again, an endonym, which it is not! It would, of course, be an English traditional name, found already in the earliest English Bibles. Here comes to our aid the following definition in the Glossary:

230    name, traditional        an ? **exonym** in relatively widespread use by a particular linguistic community and usually found in its tradition and literature. *Examples:*

Alexandrie (French) for al-Iskandariyah (Arabic); Jerusalén (Spanish) for Yerushalayim (Hebrew); Peking (English) for Beijing (Chinese).

Exonyms such as Alexandria (English), Rhodi (Italian) or Danzig (German) would then be traditional names for al-Iskandariyah, Ródhos and Gdansk, but not endonyms, to which Egypt, Greece and Poland might object.

Besides the “political” changes there is, in the definitions proposed by the Working Group on Exonyms, the unwarranted linguistic change from the original “situated” – unequivocally meaning being in a specific situation or place – to “located”, one of the lexical meanings of which is “to seek out or discover, or find the place of” [Oxford, Webster].

It seems that one of the stumbling blocks is the term “official” in definition No. 081, because there are countries which have no “official language”, such as the United Kingdom.

The undersigned, as convenor of the Working Group on Terminology, now proposes for adoption by the working group either of the following solutions.

- (a) Leave all three definitions (081 exonym, 076 endonym, 230 traditional name) as they are, recognizing the importance of the last;  
or
- (b) Modify the two first definitions as follows (changes from the present accepted definitions are underlined):

081 exonym Name used in a specific language for a geographical feature situated outside the area where that language has official status (or, where no official language exists, is widely spoken), and differing in its form from the respective endonym(s) in the area where the geographical feature is situated. *Examples:* Warsaw is the English exonym for Warszawa (Polish); Mailand is German for Milano; Londres is French for London; Quluniya is Arabic for Köln. The officially romanized endonym Moskva for Moc??a is not an exonym, nor is the Pinyin form Beijing, while Peking is an exonym. The United Nations recommends minimizing the use of exonyms in international usage, See also **? name, traditional.**

076 endonym Name of a geographical feature in an official or well established language occurring in that area where the feature is situated. *Examples:* Varanasi (not Benares); Aachen (not Aix la-Chapelle); Krung Thep (not Bangkok); Al-Uqsur (not Luxor).

## 6. Publication

It is proposed that the terms accepted and ratified by the Working Group as amendments to the *Glossary of terms for the standardization of geographical names* be produced by the Secretariat as an addendum to the *Glossary*, in conformation with resolution VIII/3, to be distributed to all owners of the original *Glossary* by a method decided upon by the Secretariat, until a second (updated) edition of the entire *Glossary* is produced.

The Working Group is now requested to discuss the amendments in order to confirm them.

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