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THIRD UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Athens, Greece

17 August - 7 September 1977

Item 7 of the agenda.

State of Geographical Place Names Committee in Zambia

(Submitted by the Government of the Republic of Zambia)*

1. On behalf of my Government I wish to extend our gratitude to the Secretary-General of the United Nations for extending the invitation to the Zambian Government to participate in this international conference for the first time. I also wish to thank the host country of Greece for the good hospitality it is giving to us here.

2. Since it is our first time to participate in this Conference, I have very little to report to the Conference about standardization of geographical names in Zambia except to say that Zambia is a developing country and it is hoped that from the participation in a conference like this one, it is going to learn more about the standardization of geographical names from the distinguished experts who are participating in this Conference.

3. Precision and the systematic rendering of geographical nomenclature is essential for technical and geographical studies. There is much attendant confusion when speakers of another language distort a name in their efforts to say it, usually producing in the case of non-European languages an incorrect and garbled version. In order to avoid this and to obtain uniformity of practice, the Geographical Place Names Committee was appointed by the Government in May 1953. The Committee's terms of reference were:

"To advise the Government on questions relating to geographical nomenclatures in the Territory, such nomenclatures covering names of rivers, hills, mountains, features of local interest i.e. any proper names which possess definite geographical and special significance".

4. The Committee met several times a year but transacted most of its routine business by circulating materials to its members. This way of conducting business was rather lengthy and slow and in some ways an unsatisfactory one.

*/ Report presented by C.M. Mubita.

5. In 1964 as a result of the reallocation of survey functions consequent upon the dissolution of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, the responsibility for national mapping was passed to the Zambian Department of Surveys. The existence of the Place Names Committee again became of more importance, and the task of reviving its functions was given to the Assistant Surveyor General in charge of mapping in the department of the Surveyor General. Then upon the appointment of the second committee the current Gazetteer of the whole country was published in 1966, and since then this edition has never been revised even though there is now a great need for its revision.

6. This Gazetteer of Geographical Names for the whole country contains some 35,000 names arranged alphabetically; code letters, numbers and abbreviations have been used to describe types of features and their administrative divisions within the provinces. Entries in the first and fifth columns consist of approved standard names, unapproved variant names cross-referenced to the approved version, and unapproved names.

7. This committee has since died, all its members have either retired or resigned from the Government. The Government has already started to work on reconvening the next committee. It is hoped that if this committee will come into existence again, efforts will be made to see that the committee does not collapse again. With the co-operation of other countries who form the Africa East, this committee will work very effectively.