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**Measures taken to standardize geographical names of Mongolia
and future objectives**

Submitted by Mongolia**

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Measures taken to standardize geographical names of Mongolia and future objectives

The history in-brief:

Studies have proven that Mongolia has a long history of geographical mapping of its own territory and it dates back to 46 AD. In 1267 Khubilai Khaan identified the location of Mongolia on the globus and gave its geographical name.

Mongolian geographical names were mentioned in the works of number of scientists and mongolists of the 19th and 20th century as Walter Fuchs, russian scientist Vladimirtsov, Belgian scientist Joseph Clear and German mongolist Walter Heissig.

Even though hundreds of foreign mongolists studied the names of places in the Secret History of Mongolia written in the 13th century about Chinggis Khaan and his life, and identified historical places of milestones, the work has not been completed.

Notwithstanding the 200-hundred year oppression of the Manchurian state and the nomadic culture, Mongolia has preserved its customs and traditions handed down by its ancestors, particularly the geographical names.

It is apparent that names of places have played a significant role in the nomadic culture. As the location of mountains, the steppe, and waters have been vital in people's relations and nomadism, our country with vast territory of 1560 thousand square km is rich in geographical names.

Due to the transition from the feudalism in the 19th century to the socialist regime, drastic changes were made in the population settlement; some historical geographical names were miscalled and forgotten since the urbanization of the nomadic culture.

The standing committee of technical terms and terminologies established in 1925 only discussed about technical words of chemistry, physics and other sciences and social and political terms which were totally new for Mongolians.

It can be said that traditional names of places were threatened to be forgotten or misspelt when the official writing of Mongolian script uigur changed to cyrillics.

Moreover, the persecution of the 1930s which took lives of many monks, priests, intellectuals and scientists and destroyed great number of temples, shrines and historical books has caused a irreparable consequences.

But the Council of Ministers (old name) issued a resolution on “prohibition of arbitrar change of geographical names” and on “establishmen of committee” in 1949 and 1961 respectively, and assigned local government agencies to identify geographical names. In this regard, Mongolia has taken into its account the georaphical names for over than 70 years.

Many mongolists, scientists and writers have been undertaking research on geographical names and published many of their works for the future generation.

For instance, alot of study has been carried out on geographical names mentioned in the Secret History of Mongolia; “Mongolian legend of names of places” and ”Sacred book of worshipped mountains and waters” books not only have re-introduced the names of sacred places and waters of our country, but also are essential for the preservance of the history, independence and local riches and for further thorough data collection and studies.

The accustomed names of places is unquestionably crafted history – cultural memorial.

For example, Bogd Khaan mountain’s/Dunjingarav gracious mountain/ valley, low mountain passes, cairns and hills have 200 names.

As for many centuries people used to name places according to its perculiarity, it is significant in the identification of mineral resources and historical figures’ lives, e.g. Oyu Tolgoi (turquoise mound), Erdenetiin ovoo (precious cairn), Mungut (Silver), Zest (Copper).

Mongolian geographical names are authentic from other countries’. It is connected to the pastoral animal husbandry tradition for many centuries. The identification of all geographical names on a map is problematic due to the scattered settlement of the population and vast territory. Not many residents are aware of the names of river bends, low ridges, springs and seasonal shelters and people tend to give a name while they pass by. More to that, names of places were tabooed in the old times and the original names have been forgotten.

But for urban dwellers names of towns, streets, buildings, compouds and squares are important. Even though people have lived in towns and cities for the last

100 years, people still are not used to names of streets, but tend to call them by their color and shape like the tradition.

The first geography institution was established in 1970 and since then the identification of geographical have been given considerable attention; the institution worked together with scientists from the Academy of Science in restoring historical names, transcribing them from foreign languages and accurate writing.

By the 280th resolution of 1980 on “Identification and regulation of names of places” of the Council of Ministers’ (old name) to establish National Standing Committee of names of places, and assigned the National Office of Geodesy and Cartography (old name) to re-identify and record territorial names on map and stop arbitrar change of geographical names..

In the framework of the implementation of the resolution, Toponomy Buro was set up and undertook field survey and re-identified over 240 thousand names of mountains, mounds, valleys, straits, waters, lakes, springs and wells and marked on 1:100 000 scale topographical map 1210, received administrative units’ confirmation, and put on geographical maps and atlases..

It is noteworthy that the shift to market economy brought political and social changes, lack of money, and previous activities came to stagnancy as there were no proper judicial system.

But in 1997 the Law on Geodesy and Cartography was ratified; its provision 11 legislated geographical names; according to its provision 5.1.3 that stated confirmation of geographical names by the parliament, 213 thousand names were approved by the parliament in 2004, and 8-volume dictionary of geographical names was published and presented to the public.

Since 1960 dictionary of geographical names has been published 3 times, although not a significant number.

Activities undertaken on geographical names and future objectives:

Despite that Mongolia was not able to participated in the activities of geographical names’ expert group until recently, we have taken considerable measures to preserve geographical names of our country.

In the future we strive to carry on the work and ensure sound toponymic heritage for future generations by doing research on history books, materials on geography and approaching the elderly with good knowledge of their region.

Geographical names are very essential factors for patriotism and people's awareness of their own history.

In this regard, the Administration of Land Affairs, Geodesy and Cartography has recognized the need for addressing the toponymic issues at the government policy level and planned various initiatives to enrich and restore the available geographical names, and appealed to the President of Mongolia. And Mongolian traditional toponyms are now under the auspices of the president of Mongolia and a resolution was made to draw public attention to preservation of toponyms and take proper measures.

The administration (of Land Affairs, Geodesy and Cartography) follows the toponymy standardization guidelines and procedures by the UN working group and has set a priority to take immediate measures to prevent extinction of traditional geographical names and undertake initiatives to restore toponyms by studying related research works and referring to the elderly who know much about different areas and regions.

In 2006 and 2007 it has organized 3 trainings on toponymy for administrative units' land agency staff.

Land ownership and privatization work launched in 2004 by the adoption of Land privatization law. Land agencies were established in all 21 aimags and 330 soums which secured proper management of toponymy and cartography issues of the country.

In particular it enabled to deal with toponym identification issues at local land agencies and initiate activities to advocate the significance of geographical names to private entities and to restore and preserve toponyms.

At first not many acknowledged fully the importance of toponyms for land privatization.

Only when confronted by different land issues caused by misspelling of names, misdepiction on maps, duplicate writing, officials at administrative level understood the significance of toponymy.

Moreover, by following the UN guidelines and procedures on toponymy standardization the Administration of Land Affairs, Geodesy and Cartography has appealed to the Parliament in 2007 to establish National Geographical Names Board.

This will allow to exercise UN guidelines on standardizing geographical names locally and internationally.

The board will ensure application of standard geographical names on official documents, books, publications, maps, and restoration, correct spelling and publicizing traditional toponyms, naming of new geographical. Unfortunately, this has not been settled fully.

The main problem we are facing is the misspelling of geographical names. We reckon by establish such board we will be able to deal with the misspelling issue properly.

In the last 2 years, the office has completed 1:100000 scale GIS map by an inventory software, which means that we will be able to identify Mongolian geographical names coordination. The inventory set-up and proper standardization activities have just been launched together with US NGA (National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency of USA).

Although the 1:100 000 scale map identified 1210 geographical features, it is inadequate for our country with a vast territory. We assume that there are over 1 million geographical on our territory.

Thus, we believe the inventory network will ensure future identification of geographical names and raise public awareness.

One of the activities last year was the translation of UN leaflet on standardizing geographical names into Mongolian. Our country has not yet participated in UN-initiated training on standardizing geographical names. Therefore, we hope for assistance from UNGEGN.

Summary

Geographical names have been important for Mongolia, a country with a nomadic culture and a territory of 1560 square km, as it was a vital reference for the people when they moved from one place to another and for their daily communication.

Our greatest attainment is Mongolian geographical names are now under the auspices of the President of Mongolia and order was made to draw proper attention and take measures. Also, the establishment of Geographical Names Board under the Parliament is in process.

The Administration of Land Affairs and Geodesy and Cartography has organized 3 trainings on standardizing geographical names among local land agencies.

The local administrations and land agencies were invited to advise on collecting data on historical geographical names.