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Writing systems and pronunciation: romanization

Issue of the romanization system for the Arab countries: between legitimacy and practices — which solutions?

Submitted by the Arabic Division of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names**

Summary***

Since the adoption of the Arabic romanization system in 1971 by the Arab League and its amendment by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names in 1972, there has been controversy over its implementation by the Arab countries themselves.

From the 22 countries that make up the Arab world, only two countries, Saudi Arabia and Libya, fully implement this system in the cartographic documents that they publish or have published in the past.

The practices of the other Arab countries are very different: while most do not apply any system, they use romanization versions that are more or less suitable in their own context.

Since the 1990s, Jordan has applied the unamended original version of the romanization system called Beirut 1971, replacing the letter “zed” by “dhad”.

The report aims to address the genesis of this system, the registered practices, the obstacles to its implementation and suggest and recommend solutions for finding a satisfactory outcome.

* E/CONF.101/1.

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*** The full report is available in the language of submission only from <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/ungegnConf10.html>.

