

23 June 2017

Original: Arabic

**Eleventh United Nations Conference on the
Standardization of Geographical Names**

New York, 8-17 August 2017

Item 5 of the provisional agenda*

**Reports by Governments on the situation in their countries and on the
progress made in the standardization of geographical names since the
Tenth Conference (for distribution only).**

Report of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Submitted by Saudi Arabia**

* E/CONF.105/1

** Prepared by Abdullah Nasser Alwelaie, Vice-Chairman of the National Committee on Geographical Names

Report of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia:

Summary:

Research on Geographical Names in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

By

Abdullah Nasser Alwelaie

**Vice-Chairman of the National Committee
on Geographical Names**

Place names are an important source of information about natural landmarks and human traces on the landscape. In addition, knowing them and interpreting them accurately are basic elements in fostering effective communication between communities and tribes, and in helping travelers to discover roads and routes throughout a country. Documenting names and describing places in the Arabian Peninsula provides a cultural record that requires attention and careful scrutiny in order to bring the area's history into focus.

In view of the growing interest in geographical names around the world in general and in Saudi Arabia in particular, together with the presence of multiple government agencies, agencies, ministries and departments that deal with place names in the Kingdom, it has become increasingly important to bring their research together. To this end, a Royal Decree was issued on August 4, 2013 to create a National Committee of Geographical Names: this encompasses all relevant government agencies, fifteen so far, and aims to contribute to the study of place names in the Kingdom and verify their authenticity. The headquarters of the National Committee has been established at the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives, in Riyadh. At the heart of the studies that are being undertaken are maps linked to geo-referenced databases run by modern geographical information systems. The use of standardized geographical names is essential: duplication or a variety of spellings would result in confusion, whether with regard to the monitoring, analysis or provision of services. Such confusion is prevented by an official body that is entrusted with the primary mission of synergizing all contributions in order to standardize geographical names, in terms of spelling, pronunciation, and Romanization.

It was deemed appropriate at this stage to write a book that drew together all research on the study of geographical names throughout the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In order to do this, the activities of all government agencies in this field were monitored. This was undertaken unilaterally by the King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives, and when the book was completed I presented the information that it had brought together in a lecture to representatives of all relevant government agencies. Subsequently, I gave them all a copy of the book, asking them to complete any missing information or to endorse its content, and most of them gave assistance. It became clear that great efforts were being exerted to collect and collate more data, highlighting that the initial collection of geographical names had not been comprehensive. This emphasized the urgent need for coordination and integration of the

government agencies involved, via the National Committee of Geographical Names in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.