

Group of Experts on  
Geographical names

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Agenda item 5

REPORT OF THE ARABIC DIVISION

( presented by Mr. A. Tazi, Divisional Chairman )

## REPORT OF THE ARABIC DIVISION

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The members of the Arabic Division during the last 2 years have kept in touch with each other concerning the standardization of geographical names. Although the Arab speaking countries are undergoing some sensitive political development, the Arab experts are still exchanging opinion and views on issues with common interest. The main area of concentration which occupied the focus of the Arabic Division was the attempt to arrive at one common system for the romanization of the Arabic characters so as to use the same name identically from either the way it is pronounced or the way it is written.

The experts have also concentrated on the translation of the Terminology Bulletin into the Arabic language which was proposed by the Secretariat.

A third issue of importance is the continuation of alerting the Arab Governments of the importance of working in this context within the framework of the UN Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names and the importance that should be given to the establishment of National Committee for working on these national names.

As far as the first point is concerned we have found out that several scientific and academic institutions have given great importance to arrive at one system for the transliteration of Arabic letters. Some

of the Arab countries, however, were affected by the Anglo-Saxon methodology in the use of their transliteration. Others were affected by the European method in the same way. This is in addition to the width and the broadness that the Arabic language has, which made it rather difficult to arrive at a unified opinion.

However, because of the overall desire to arrive at the solution, most of the members of the group had to follow up one system that was studied before and we found ourselves coming closer and closer to the Beirut System. As far as the translation of Terminology Bulletin is concerned, I would like to record here that after consultations with many specialists, I have submitted to the Secretariat the outcome of these consultations which I have undertaken hoping that it will be satisfactory to them after they are examined in the following meetings.

Concerning the third point, I would like to record here my full satisfaction that all Arab countries have been responsive to the importance and the goals of the UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. All Arab countries have expressed in one way or another their concern through actual attendance in public conferences or in expert groups. This reality is expressed by the number of representatives from Arab countries in the international arena which is becoming larger and larger.

A training course in Toponymy for the Arab speaking countries was hosted by the Kingdom of Morocco between 2-7 December 1985. It was organized by my dear colleague, Mr. Max de Henseler, and a working paper on this subject is distributed.

I would like to report now on 3 matters I have undertaken during the last 2 years:

1. In September 1985 I have visited the Jordan National Geographic Centre which is headed by Engr. Rafaat Majali where I have observed personally the works of the Centre, in particular the long-term goals which our group of experts is trying to accomplish either through the standardization of the use of the Arabic letter or the translation of the scientific terminology in a manner related to same;

2. In December I visited the institution in charge of the standardization of geographical names in the city of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in particular the University of King Saud, where I had a presentation by my colleague, Dr. Asaad Abdo about the great effort that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is attempting towards the standardization of geographical names which is very thorough; finally

3. At a request from the Moroccan Academy, I gave a lecture to its members in March 1986 on the works undertaken by the UN Social Economic Council and especially on the UN Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names and its experts group including its structure covering the expertise required to put the foundation for the geographical expressions as well as the way the names are pronounced and written.

After this lecture there was a question and answer period lasting for 2 hours which expressed the importance given to our work, I have been convinced after all of these that we should, in addition to what has been done so far, initiate educational information missions in all

media so that the people everywhere would know the importance of the geographical names as part of the national culture as well as historical guide and a landmark of civilization.

I happen to believe that the dissemination of information to the people in all the above-mentioned subjects is one of the most important means that would make the experts more understood to their satisfaction in this above-mentioned subjects.

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