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Second United Nations Training Course in Toponymy

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SECOND UNITED NATIONS TRAINING COURSE IN TOPONYMY

Following the successful 'first' United Nations Training Course in Toponymy for English-speaking countries, held in Cisarua, Indonesia in June 1982, a Second UN Training Course in Toponymy for Arabic-speaking countries was held in Rabat, Morocco, 2-7 December 1985. Upon invitation from UN, the course was organized by Professor Abdelhadi Tazi, President of the Moroccan Commission on the Standardization of Geographical Names in close cooperation with Director Abdelatif Belbachir and his staff of the Conservation Foncière et des Travaux Topographiques (The National Mapping Agency in Morocco). His Excellency Moulay Ahmed Alaoui, Secretary-General of the Ministère de l'Agriculture et de la Réforme Agraire delivered the keynote address. As part of the opening ceremony all participants visited the mausoleum of King Mohammed V (1961) who as Sultan Ibn Yusuf was an untiring champion of Morocco's freedom.

The UN were represented by Dr. Max C. de Henseler, Co-Director of the Training Course, and internationally known for his able guidance of numerous UN cartographic conferences and seminars.

The course was primarily intended for staff of mapping agencies in Arab-speaking countries and it was a great satisfaction for the organizers that 15 out of 21 Arab-speaking countries had sent their experts. In total, some 120 participants were registered. The meeting was widely advertised in the streets of Rabat by posters and banners and it was well covered by the media, including radio and television.

The course was held in the conference room of the Direction de la Statistique which is equipped with the most up-to-date technical devices. Lectures were delivered in French or in Arabic. For participants less conversant with one of the two languages, simultaneous translation into the other was available.

The course programme followed the recommendations of the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names. Successively the following subjects were dealt with: 1 Terminology in toponymy; 2 Activities of the UN in the field of standardisation of Geographical Names; 3 Role of Geographical Names; 4 Name collection in the field; 5 Office treatment of names; 6 Changes of names, new names, commemorative names; 7 Glossaries and National Gazetteers; 8 Cartography and Toponymy.

UN guest lecturers Professor Saad Abdou (Saudi Arabia), Christian Bonelli (Canada) and F.J. Ormeling Snr. (Netherlands) dealt with most of these introductory subjects, while speakers of the host country and other Arabic-speaking countries contributed in presenting additional information on a national level. Among the Moroccan speakers was Professor Tazi, member of the UNGEON, whose lecture of the transliteration of Arabic into Roman script gave rise to lively and prolonged discussions, focussing on the transliteration system obtained by the Conference in Beirut (1971) and its subsequent modifications, its presumed merits and shortcomings and possible alternate solutions.

Visits to the various departments of the Conservation Foncière et des Travaux Topographiques and an excursion to a barrage outside the city of Rabat and vital for its water supply and manufacturing industry formed a welcome change to the lecture programme.

At the closing session, organizers and participants praised UN's initiative unanimously, expecting positive effects of the training course upon geographical names standardization procedures in the respective Arab-speaking countries.