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REPORTS OF THE DIVISIONS AND LIAISON OFFICERS
REPORT BY THE USA/CANADA DIVISION
PAPER PRESENTED BY THE CHAIR OF THE USA/CANADA DIVISION

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Since the 13th UNGEGN session in 1987, most of the work carried out by the division focussed on national programs of the US Board on Geographic Names (BGN) and the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (CPCGN) rather than on particular UN activities.

However, three areas of divisional cooperation should be mentioned. Reflecting concerns expressed several years ago, BGN and CPCGN continued efforts to study features common to both countries that have different names and to develop a mechanism for reducing possible confusion of feature identification. After reaching a consensus on guidelines, representatives of BGN and CPCGN, met in Washington, D.C. in June of 1988 to elaborate a final statement for the approval of both names boards. The resulting document identifies a number of principles and procedures in naming which, while aiming towards standardization of feature names, draws attention to the recognition of local cultural and historical factors in an appropriate manner.

The document also recognized the important role of the International Boundary Commission of Canada and the United States in disseminating official geographic names information through its maps of border areas. Consequently, the BGN/CPCGN agreement encouraged the Commission to undertake a new series of boundary maps to replace those of the early decades of the century. A pilot project map for a small section of the international border was prepared by Energy, Mines and Resources Canada. Names of places and features in Canada and the United States were jointly discussed and reviewed at the colour proof stage by BGN and CPCGN staff.

A second item occupying increasing attention of both divisional members is automated names processing. Documents on national programs have been exchanged to the benefit of both authorities. BGN has also provided information on its practices for spelling names of features in various other countries.

The third category of work relates to Resolution 22 of the 5th UN Conference, Aboriginal/Native Geographical Names. Canadian authorities have had considerable experience in this area, and the United States more recently has undertaken a program to develop methods for collecting and processing native American names. As a result, BGN representatives have requested available documentation from their Canadian counterparts on various occasions. Further, a BGN staff official attended a meeting in Canada dealing with the topic. In March of 1989, BGN issued a pamphlet on methods to collect and process native American geographic names. The CPCGN is currently drafting a manual for the field recording of Inuit and Canadian Indian toponyms. This field will occupy an increasingly significant share of program time of authorities in both countries.

In all, relationships between divisional members remain at a high level and help assure maximum exchange of information.