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**REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON  
TOPONYMIC TERMINOLOGY**

**for the period 1992-1994**

**Presented by the Convenor\***

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**Report of the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology  
for the period 1992-1994**

**1. Resolution No. 11 of the Sixth UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.**

Both the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, at its sixteenth session, and the Sixth UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, held in New York in August-September 1992, discussed the activity of the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology and, in particular, the *Dictionary of Toponymic Terminology*. The discussions were summarized in the *Report of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names on the Work of its Sixteenth Session* (see document [GEGN/16] of 6 April 1993, p. 12, paras. 58 and 59), and in *Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, Vol. I, Report of the Conference* (document E/CONF.85/3, 1993), pp. 20-21, paras. 143, 144, 145, 146 and 147.

The main result of these discussions was Resolution No. 11 of the Sixth Conference. The proposed text for this Resolution was presented to the Conference as document E/CONF.85/L.5, and was approved, with minor modifications, by both the Conference and the Group of Experts. The text, as approved, was presented by the Secretariat in the paper *Adopted Resolutions (3 September 1992)*. See Appendix A to the present Report for the full text.

However, document E/CONF.85/3 (*Vol. I, Report of the Conference*) issued in 1993 carries a different wording. In para. 3 of Resolution No. 11, the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology is asked "... to review the glossary periodically...", whereas the original text as approved by the Conference was "... to review the dictionary...". The difference is substantial: the Glossary was the preliminary text up to and including Version 1.2, while Version 2.0 (as approved) already constitutes Part I of the *Multilingual Dictionary of Toponymic Terminology*, and this (and not the Glossary), as well as the different language versions (see below), should be periodically reviewed.

A further change was introduced after the text was approved by the Conference and by UNGEGN. Para. 1 (b) of Resolution No. 11 read, in the original, "...that the United Nations Secretariat be asked to supply, within an agreed time-frame, a translation... from the English text into each of the five other official United Nations languages". To this the following phrase was added at some later stage "... and within existing resources".

While the reason for the addition is obvious, and might be justified from a practical point of view, the question arises whether a text approved by a United Nations Conference can be modified without notification (and approval) of the originators (the delegates to the Conference and the Experts), and whether there exists a body with the authority to override

the intrinsic text (and not only the wording) of resolutions. In a letter by the Executive Secretary dated 4 August 1993 (concerning another Conference topic) it was stated that "... the secretariat has no right to amend or alter the report".

It is suggested that this matter be discussed in principle by the Group of Experts and be brought before the Seventh Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

## **2. Translation into Other Languages – General**

Resolution No. 11 of the Sixth Conference recommends, in para. 1 (b), that the UN Secretariat be asked "... to supply .... a translation of the new Glossary from English into each of the other five official languages of the United Nations." Furthermore, it was agreed (para. 2) that, after basic translation by the Conference and Translation Services, the Group of Experts "... appoint one or more experts ... to coordinate and be responsible for the translation into each of these languages". During discussions of this item by the Group of Experts on 4 September 1992 the representative of the Conference and Translation Services informed the Group that translation could be effected only after the beginning of 1993. Accordingly, the Convenor of the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology on 10 February 1993 dispatched the material to be translated, amended after the meetings of the Working Group on 28 August and 1 September 1992, to the Secretariat in New York, both on diskette and as a laser printout.

On 17 September 1993 the Convenor was informed that the Secretariat was still "... searching for funds [for translation] .... but the chance is not too promising due to the unprecedented lack of funds being experienced by the United Nations at the present time".

On 4 October 1993 the UN Translation Unit informed the Convenor via the Secretariat that "since the translators do not possess the expertise to adequately deal with technical terms, they suggest that this glossary of terminology be made available to the experts nominated for each language so that they could edit [?] the translation of these technical terms in conformity with changes and/or additions introduced by you".

Since this procedure hardly conforms to the spirit of the original Resolution No. 11 nor to its wording, it is suggested that the Group of Experts take up the matter at its Seventeenth Session in order to ensure the translation within a reasonable time frame.

## **3. Translation into Chinese**

Notwithstanding the situation described above, China has already taken upon itself to translate the dictionary into Chinese, and the Convenor avails himself of this opportunity to express his thanks to Prof. Du Xiangming, Beijing, for arranging the translation.

#### 4. Translation into German

The Dutch- and German-Speaking Division of UNGEGN decided in 1993 to have the Dictionary translated into German. Dr. Jörn Sievers and Dr. Karl-August Seel negotiated the first contact with the Convenor and, after completion of the rough translation, asked the latter to send his comments and corrections concerning the German version. This request was complied with, and the translation is now under review by the said Division.

In May 1993, on the occasion of the International Cartographic Conference held in Köln (Cologne), Germany, the Convenor gave a brief talk to members of the German *Ständiger Ausschuss für Geographische Namen* (Permanent Committee for Geographical Names), describing the *Dictionary* and its history.

#### 5. Utilization of the Dictionary at the UN Toponymy Courses for Southern African Countries

The Glossary of Toponymic Terminology (constituting the early English version of the *Dictionary of Toponymic Terminology*) has, by now, been used twice in a toponymic training environment. Version 1.2 was introduced at the first UN Training Course in Toponymy for Southern African Countries held in Pretoria, South Africa, in July 1992, with a lecture about the Dictionary by the Convenor being followed by a practical exercise in its application by the students. This feature was repeated in the second course, again held in Pretoria in September 1993. The Glossary was appended to the training manual *An Introduction to Toponymy – Theory and Practice of Geographical Names* by N. Kadmon published by the Department of Geography, University of Pretoria, 1993 (ISBN 0-86979-905-3).

#### 6. Tasks for the Near Future

The most urgent task now is to have the Dictionary translated into the remaining official languages of the United Nations, checked by the Experts appointed by UNGEGN, and edited by the Convenor/Editor. It is hoped that this project will be completed before the Eighteenth Session of the Group of Experts – given the necessary assistance and facilities by the Secretariat.

The second task, both current and extending into the future, is reviewing and updating the Dictionary periodically, as recommended in Resolution 11 (para. 3) of the Sixth Conference.

## Appendix A

### Resolution No. 11 of the Sixth UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, 1992

Note: The text below follows the wording approved by the Conference and the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names. Additions and changes introduced at some later stage are indicated in square brackets.

#### Glossary of Toponymic Terminology

##### The Conference

Noting that a new glossary has been prepared by the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology, as recommended by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names at its fifteenth session,

Noting further that, in accordance with the same recommendation, the glossary was compiled, in the first stage, in English only,

Recognizing that, to achieve maximum effect in the standardization of geographical names at national and international levels, the glossary should be available to as wide a readership as possible,

1. Recommends:

(a) That the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology be asked to continue to function, with the aim of producing a multilingual dictionary of toponymic terminology to include the remaining five official languages of the United Nations;

(b) That the United Nations Secretariat be asked to supply, within an agreed time-frame [and within existing resources,] a translation of the new Glossary from English into each of the other five official languages of the United Nations;

2. Recommends further that the United Nations group of Experts on Geographical Names, at its sixteenth session, appoint one or more experts to the Working Group to coordinate and be responsible for the translation into each of these languages;

3. Recommends also that the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology be asked to review the dictionary [glossary] periodically and update it as necessary.