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Report of the Ad Hoc Group of Experts on Geographical Names on its First Session
22 September 1967

Committee IV

Committee IV, on international co-operation, agreed that the good work done and the momentum attained before and during the Conference would best be continued and strengthened by the formation of a permanent committee within the structure of the United Nations. The membership and functions of such a committee were discussed. The experiences of some national names authorities were considered to be relevant. A working group was formed to draft a resolution and a supporting explanatory background paper. The members of the working group were the representatives of Canada, China, the Federal Republic of Germany, Iran, the Netherlands, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the United States of America and the representative of the International Hydrographic Bureau (IHB). The working group was assisted by the representative of the Secretary-General, the Executive Secretary, the Deputy-Executive Secretary, and the President of the Conference. The background paper prepared by the working group, as approved by the Committee and the plenary Conference, read as follows:

"Background paper in support of the resolution on the establishment of a United Nations Permanent Committee of Experts on Geographical Names

"The writing of geographical names on maps and other documents has long been a source of difficulty and confusion and an obstacle to smooth progress and

understanding in many economic, social and scientific activities, both national and international.

"1. Some examples of the problems are:

"(a) Places having different names in different languages — for example, Jerusalem/El Quds;

"(b) Places having different spellings in different languages — for example, Geneva/Genève/Genf/Ginebra/Ginevra;

"(c) Different methods of transliterating from one alphabet to another — for example, from Arabic: Wadi el Jabal/Ouadi el Djebel/Ouadi el Gabal;

"(d) Different methods of transcribing ideographic languages (for example, Chinese) to alphabetic languages;

"(e) Differing methods of rendering names from unwritten languages;

"(f) The exact extent of named geographical features;

"(g) Variations in the meanings of common geographic terms: for example, 'creek' may refer to an inlet from the sea or to a small stream far from the sea.

"2. The lack of standardized names has caused difficulty in the work of map makers, statisticians, census takers and others, leading to undue and harmful delay and mistakes. Confusion is caused in the interpretation of legal and administrative documents dealing with such matters as boundaries or areas of jurisdiction.

"3. Nearly a century ago (in 1873) the first meeting of the International Geographical Union noted the problem and passed a resolution that international usage should be based on national standardization. Other resolutions have followed at later meetings of this and other international organizations.

"4. The need for seeking solutions to the problems and moving towards some international standardization was considered by the United Nations as long ago as 1953; later, Economic and Social Council resolutions 715 A (XXVII) and 929 (XXXV) marked two important steps in recognition which led the United Nations to convene the first international conference devoted exclusively to the subject at Geneva in 1967.

"5. The Conference has carefully and fully considered what the next goals should be and how to achieve them and has embodied its views in a series of resolutions. In order to ensure the implementation of these resolutions and the maintenance of the momentum in international co-operation achieved in this Conference it is necessary to create a United Nations Permanent Committee on Geographical Names.

"6. The Committee should consist of:

"(a) Experts on the standardization of geographical names;

"(b) A secretariat.

"7. The principal functions of the proposed Committee would be:

"(a) The collection of information on their work from national and international bodies dealing with the standardization of geographical names;

"(b) The collection and review of gazetteers, topographical glossaries, technical instructions on toponymic work etc.;

"(c) The dissemination of information compiled from (a) and (b) to Member States and agencies, perhaps by way of periodical bulletins;

"(d) Consultation with Member States having practical experience of specific problems (for example, the application of automatic data processing to work on geographical names); working groups to include representatives of such States might be formed to deal with such matters;

"(e) The working out of principles and methods for solving the various problems of international standardization (for example, definitions of geographic terms, transfers between writing systems, treatment of names of international geographical features);

"(f) Scientific and technical aid and advice to developing countries in organizing and operating national names authorities. The Commission might act as a clearing-house for bilateral aid agreements covering such things as the provision of experts, literature or fellowships;

"(g) Certain tasks connected with United Nations or other regional and international conferences.

"8. Suitable experts are already available in the national names authorities of several nations and it is proposed that initially an *ad hoc* group of experts be named by nations willing to provide the services of their representatives.

"9. The Permanent Committee should include representatives of each of the major world linguistic/geographic groups. The final composition of such groups requires some study, which should be the first priority task of the *ad hoc* group of experts. The following fourteen groups are suggested:

"Anglo-American	"Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
Latin American	Arabic group
United Kingdom-Australia-New Zealand	South-West Asia other than Arabic
German and Dutch speaking countries	Indian group
Norden	South-East Asia
Romance-language Europe	East Asia
East Central and South-East Europe	Africa south of the Sahara

"10. Countries which consider that they belong to a given region should agree among themselves as to which country will provide an expert to represent the region.

"11. It is thought that initially the Committee might meet once a year. It would be necessary for the travelling expenses of each expert to be financed by his own organization or Government.

"12. The existing Cartography Section of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations has already provided the secretariat for this first United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names and all the necessary work preceding this Conference. It is recommended that this arrangement should continue

until, in the light of working experience, the *ad hoc* group of experts shall advise the United Nations on the number and prerequisites of the secretarial staff which might be needed for the efficient servicing of the United Nations Permanent Committee of Experts on Geographical Names. At the present stage it is foreseen that the professional staff would require a background of geographical training, preferably combined with specializations in cartography and/or linguistics. A suitable director would need to possess organizational ability and a personality suitable for technical discussions."

The draft resolution on the creation of a United Nations Permanent Committee of Experts submitted by the Committee was adopted by the Conference as resolution 1.

Possible methods of collection and distribution of relevant written material such as gazetteers, glossaries, maps, technical instructions, professional papers and reports were considered. The Committee agreed that

the Cartography Section of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs could continue to perform this function until the creation of a permanent commission which might determine the future disposition of material related to the standardization of geographical names. Continued liaison between the Cartography Section of the United Nations and other international organizations having an interest in geographical names was considered important. The representative of the Holy See mentioned that the Study Centre of Religious Toponymy of Vatican City proposed to publish a bulletin containing articles and bibliographical information and placed its available resources at the disposal of Member States. A draft resolution on the subject of exchange of information and preparation of bibliographies was approved by the Committee and adopted by the Conference as resolution 5.

III. RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED BY THE CONFERENCE

1. United Nations Permanent Committee of Experts on Geographical Names

The Conference,

Recognizing the importance of a continuing effort by States Members of the United Nations and members of its specialized agencies and other interested international organizations for advancing the standardization of geographical names,

Considering the United Nations to have the most appropriate means for providing the facilities for such an effort,

Recommends to the Economic and Social Council that a United Nations permanent committee on geographical names be created, consisting of experts, to provide for continuous co-ordination and liaison among nations to further the standardization of geographical names and to encourage the formation and work of regional groups;

Further recommends to the Council that the composition of the United Nations Permanent Committee of Experts on Geographical Names should reflect geographical/linguistic distribution, that it should be assisted by the services of a secretariat within the United Nations, and that the members of the Committee should meet annually, beginning in 1968, at their Governments' expense;

Requests that the Secretariat of the United Nations continue to act as the central agency to follow up the clearing-house functions for geographical names by:

(a) Collecting information concerning technical procedures and gazetteers;

(b) Collecting data on techniques and systems used by countries in the transliteration and transcription of geographical names;

(c) Disseminating to all States Members of the United Nations and members of its specialized agencies all information on the work of the Permanent Committee of Experts on Geographical Names as well

as on the work of Member States as reported to the United Nations, utilizing where feasible existing United Nations periodicals and other means of communication available.