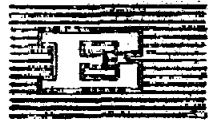


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THE ROMAN ALPHABET RULE *

Submitted by the Government of the United States of America

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THE ROMAN ALPHABET RULE

For the last twenty-five years the work of the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (PCGN) has been firmly based on what it calls the "roman alphabet rule", that is, the principle of accepting the official forms of foreign geographical names if they are officially written in or officially transcribed into forms of the roman alphabet.

The first part of this rule is now generally accepted. Most roman-alphabet countries adopt without alteration the spellings of names in other roman-alphabet countries. Though it may not be possible in all circumstances to reproduce unfamiliar diacritics, at least the basic alphabetic shape is preserved unchanged. But the significance of the second part of the rule is much less widely appreciated and it may be useful to expand upon its importance in international standardization. It applies to those countries which, though their national languages are not written in the roman alphabet, make use of romanized forms of their names for one or more of the following administrative purposes:-

- (a) the production of basic topographic mapping (e.g. Ireland, India, Pakistan, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Muscat and Oman, Kuwait, Trucial States, South Arabia)
- (b) the production of medium-scale mapping kept up to date by periodic revision (e.g. Israel)
- (c) as a component in bilingual mapping (e.g. Ceylon, United Arab Republic, Lebanon, Syria, Sudan, Jordan, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, Burma)

The rule does not apply to small-scale romanized maps produced officially for information, tourist or other non-administrative purposes.

The advantages to standardization offered by these hundreds of thousands of romanized names throughout large areas of the world would seem self-evident, yet it is not uncommon to find atlases, small-scale maps and gazetteers where names in India are transliterated from Hindi, names in Pakistan transliterated from Urdu and Bengali, names in Israel romanized by systems different from that used by the Survey of Israel and names in the United Arab Republic romanized by systems different from that used by the Survey of Egypt, etc.

It is true that these administrative romanization systems do not always accurately reflect the true form of the name in the national language, and it is to be hoped in such cases that the national gazetteer will provide this information.