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UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE STANDARDIZATION  
OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE FIRST MEETING

held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,  
on Monday, 4 September 1967, at 3.5 p.m.

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|-----------------------------|--------------------|---|
| <u>Acting President:</u>    | Mr. VELEBIT        | Executive Secretary,<br>Economic Commission for<br>Europe |
| <u>President:</u>           | Mr. BURRILL        | United States of America                                  |
| <u>Rapporteur:</u>          | Mr. GOMEZ de SILVA | Mexico  |
| <u>Executive Secretary:</u> | Mr. URETA          |   |

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OPENING OF THE CONFERENCE (Provisional agenda item 1)

The ACTING PRESIDENT extended, on behalf of the Secretary-General, a welcome to the participants in the Conference.

The question of standardization of geographical names had been before the Economic and Social Council since 1953 and had been studied at Regional Cartographic Conferences for Asia and the Far East and for Africa respectively. In 1958 a draft programme for achieving international uniformity in the writing of geographical names had been circulated to all States Members of the United Nations; most countries had expressed the view that the immediate task of standardization should be performed on the national level. In 1959, under Council resolution 715 A (XXVII), the Secretary-General had been requested to set up a small group of consultants to consider the technical problems of domestic standardization of geographical names. The report of the Group of Experts on Geographical Names established pursuant to that resolution, which was before the Conference in document E/CONF.53/L.2, dealt with four topics: the need for standardization; problems of domestic standardization; recommendations on problems of such standardization; and the question of convening an international conference. As a result of the Group's conclusions on the last-mentioned topic, the Council, by its resolution 929 (XXXV), had requested the Secretary-General to consult with Member States on the desirability of convening such a conference and on the date, place and tentative agenda. In the light of the Secretary-General's consultations, the Council had decided at its thirty-ninth session that a Conference should be held at Geneva in 1967.

The Group of Experts on Geographical Names had been reconvened at a preparatory meeting in March and April 1966; the report on that meeting was before the Conference in document E/CONF.53/L.1. The Group had considered the provisional agenda for the Conference and had reviewed all the comments received on the subject from Governments since 1956. It had been agreed that the rules of procedure for the Conference should

be those used at the United Nations Technical Conference on the International Map of the World on the Millionth Scale, held at Bonn in 1962. The Group had also considered it desirable that the Conference should be discussed at the regional level, and items relating to geographical names had been included in the agenda of the second United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Africa, held at Tunis in September 1966, and of the fifth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Far East, held at Canberra in March 1967.

The adoption of a uniform standard method of writing geographical names involved two basic questions: standardization of the form of geographical names by the country concerned, and the adoption of standard methods of transliteration or transcription. The first question involved standardization at the national level; the second, adoption of general principles for international standards. The Conference would no doubt provide guidance on international methods of transliteration and on international co-ordination and liaison. He wished the Conference every success in helping to further the purposes of the United Nations.

ADOPTION OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE (Provisional agenda item 2)

The ACTING PRESIDENT drew attention to the proposal in paragraph 5 of the report of the Group of Experts (E/CONF.53/L.1) that the rules of procedure for the Conference should be those of the United Nations Technical Conference on the International Map of the World on the Millionth Scale (United Nations publication, sales No: 64.I.4, pp. 11-14), with two minor amendments. Under the first amendment, rule 3 would provide for a Credentials Committee of five instead of seven members. The second amendment, to rule 32, was purely stylistic.

The amendments proposed by the Group of Experts were adopted.

Mr. GOMEZ de SILVA (Mexico) proposed that, in rule 34, Spanish should be added as a working language. He made that proposal, firstly, because Spanish had already been a basic language in the preparatory work for the Conference and was specifically mentioned, in the last sentence of paragraph 12 of the report of the Group of Experts, as one of three languages on which systems for conversion into the Roman alphabet might be based. Secondly, the Conference had been convened by the Economic and Social Council, which had made Spanish a working language by its resolution 481 (XV) of 1 April 1953.

Mr. PEREZ GALINO (Spain) supported that proposal.

The Mexican amendment was adopted.

The rules of procedure, as amended, were adopted.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS (provisional agenda item 3)

Mr. GALL (Guatemala) nominated Mr. Burrill (United States of America), for the office of President of the Conference.

Mr. GOMEZ de SILVA (Mexico) seconded that nomination.

Mr. Burrill (United States of America) was elected President by acclamation.

Mr. Burrill (United States of America) took the Chair.

The PRESIDENT thanked the participants in the Conference for the honour they had done him by allowing him to serve as their President. The long preparations for the Conference had been fraught with obstacles and setbacks and, although the Conference had at last been convened, the road to complete success would still be long and difficult. It would be wise to recognize from the outset that there could be no question of solving all outstanding problems during the next three weeks. On the other hand, if all participants realized from the start that they were bound to differ and understood why that was so, great progress would be made, and the Conference could not fail in its purpose if it was conducted in that spirit. Its success depended above all on recognition that all participants wanted to reach international agreement, and on their will to achieve greater uniformity. He was glad to see that many of those present were young men, who could begin to find out about the problems at issue, to get to know others concerned with the subject, to ascertain what had been done and to decide on what could be done.

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Mr. FALLA (United Kingdom) nominated Mr. Baranov (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) for the office of First Vice-President.

Mr. SUNTHAN (Cambodia) seconded that nomination.

Mr. Baranov (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) was elected First Vice-President by acclamation.

Mr. KHAMUNDARA (Thailand) nominated Mr. Coker (Nigeria) for the office of Second Vice-President.

Mr. LOXTON (Kenya) seconded that nomination.

Mr. Coker (Nigeria) was elected Second Vice-President by acclamation.

Mr. PEARCY (United States of America) nominated Mr. Gomez de Silva (Mexico) for the office of Rapporteur.

Mr. ANDERSON (Denmark) and Mr. CORDERAS DESCARREGA (Spain) seconded that nomination.

Mr. Gomez de Silva (Mexico) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.

REPORT ON CREDENTIALS (provisional agenda item 4)

The PRESIDENT said that delegations would be allowed more than twenty-four hours in which to submit their credentials. However, any considerable delay would mean either that the names of the representatives in question would not appear on the official list of delegations or that the publication of the list itself might be delayed.

In accordance with rule 3 of the rules of procedure, the Credentials Committee would consist of five members. He suggested that four of those members should be the officers of the Conference, and the fifth a representative from some geographical area other than those of the officers. He specifically suggested that the fifth member should be Mr. Lambert (Australia).

It was so decided.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA (provisional agenda item 5) (E/CONF.53/1)

The PRESIDENT pointed out that the provisional agenda (E/CONF.53/1) was the same as that contained in the report of the Group of Experts (E/CONF.53/L.1, paragraph 8).

Mr. LAMBERT (Australia), supported by Mr. DROLET (Canada), proposed that the provisional agenda should be adopted.

The provisional agenda was adopted unanimously.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK (agenda item 6) (E/CONF.53/L.1)

The PRESIDENT pointed out that the Group of Experts had recommended (E/CONF.53/L.1, paragraph 6) the establishment of four principal committees to deal, respectively, with national standardization, geographical terms, writing systems and international co-operation.

The recommendation was adopted.

The PRESIDENT suggested that it would be useful to have a steering committee which would be representative of the different parts of the world. Such a steering committee might consist of the officers of the Conference and the chairmen of the four principal committees.

It was so decided.

In reply to a question from Mr. BREU (Austria), the PRESIDENT said that each of the principal committees would operate as a committee of the whole. After each plenary meeting of the Conference, the President, Vice-Presidents and Rapporteur would take their places at the committee table and would be replaced by the officers of the committee in question.

He expressed the hope that delegations which had submitted papers would comment on them briefly, and not in detail; they should emphasize the salient features of their papers and show how they related to the problem as a whole. Participants should not hesitate to request clarification of anything which they did not understand. The purpose of the Conference would best be served by consistent frankness, with candid acknowledgment of failures as well as of successes.

The meeting rose at 4.15 p.m.