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Item 10  
of the Provisional Agenda

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

**Report of the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology**

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## Report of the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology

The English text of the *Glossary of Toponymic Terminology* -- renamed from the former title of Dictionary -- underwent several amendments since its inception, and these were designated versions 1 to 4. It was finalized as version 4.1 (with the ultimate definition of the terms "endonym" and "exonym") during the course of the Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in January 1998 under agenda item 7 [1]

In accordance with Resolution No. 11 of the Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names [2], the English text of the *Glossary of Toponymic Terminology* was translated into the following official languages of the United Nations:

- Chinese -- Prof. Du Xiangming had supplied the convenor with a first translation of version 2 into Chinese in June 1994, and a corrected and improved printout in July 1996 which brought it to version 3 standard..
- French -- The French form of version 3, translated by Mme. Lejeune (France) and M. Dugas (Quebec, Canada) was handed to the convenor during the 18th Session of UNGEGN in August 1996. However, this differed somewhat from the English form, some definitions being adapted to French use
- Spanish -- Dr. Cruz (Spain) sent his translation of version 2 to the convenor in July 1997. Version 4 was received in February 1998.
- Arabic -- Version 1.2 was also received during the Seventh Conference in 1998.
- Russian -- No progress can be reported as to the Russian version.

It had been intended that the translations be effected by the Documentary and Translation Services of the United Nations Secretariat, and the Director of these Services was indeed present during some of the discussions and deliberations of the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology; only checking and professional "streamlining" was to be done by UNGEGN experts. However, no budgetary allocation was accorded by the U.N. Secretariat to this operation, and the above-mentioned translations were performed voluntarily by the various UNGEGN experts, thus incurring no expense to the United Nations.

At the Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names the representative of the Russian Federation announced that the translation of the *Glossary* would be performed by experts from his country. Up to the time of writing (December 1999), Russian is the only text missing.

A further problem is that of bringing the four existing translations (Chinese, French, Spanish and Arabic) -- and the Russian one, if and when received -- up to the final standard of version 4.1. This also entails a common numbering system; of the above, only the Chinese translation was numbered in parallel with the original English text. Achieving his "standardization" or uniformity is, of course, indispensable in order to fulfil the requirement of resolution 11 of the Sixth Conference (see above), namely to publish the set of basic English text and translations into the other five official languages of the United Nations as a multi-lingual glossary, "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"

In order to enable this updating to be done by the voluntary translators, the final text as amended by the Seventh Conference, was sent by the convenor to the UNGEGN Secretariat both on diskette and as a clean printout, with all foreign language and non-Roman script examples, with the request to convey copies to the translators. To the query whether

this has been done no reply has as yet been received. It is hoped that during the meeting on item 10 on the agenda of the 20th session of UNGEGN in New York in January 2000, further information on this matter will be received, and hopefully at least some of the updated translations as well as the missing Russian version.

#### Plans for the Future.

(1) The next step, again in accordance with Resolution VI/11, will then be the collating of the six language versions. Since the convenor of the Working Group on Toponymic Terminology, as editor of the *Glossary*, is unable to do this at least for the Chinese and Russian versions, it is proposed to devote a special meeting of the translators (perhaps within a meeting of the entire Working Group), before the 21st Session of UNGEGN -- of course under the proviso that by then all translations updated to version 4.1 will be in hand.

(2) After item (1) above has been effected, the *Glossary of Toponymic Terminology* should be published, both in print and on electronic media.

(3) Only after this step should work on carrying out Recommendation 3 of Resolution VI/11 be taken in hand, namely further updating the *Glossary* as required, in all six languages.

Finally, it might be stressed that among all documents and publications produced by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names and the Conferences, the *Glossary of Toponymic Terminology* is the one which had the widest exposure to, and most input by, members of the Group. Its use should indeed contribute to standardization and, especially, to the training of appropriate staffs.

#### Notes

[1] Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, New York, 13-23 January 1998. Vol. I, Report of the Conference. Paragraphs 158-161, pp. 28-29.

[2] Resolution No. 11 of the Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, 1992:

#### 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 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 glossary periodically and update it as necessary.