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Geographical Names**

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Item 5  
of Provisional Agenda

REPORTS OF THE DIVISIONS

**Report of the Arabic Division**

## Algeria

The Standing Committee for Geographical Names was established by ministerial decree and was officially set up on 23 November 1998 by the Minister of the Interior and Local Communities and the President of the National Council for Geographical Information. Since that time, the Committee, which has 13 members from various areas of specialisation and ministerial departments, has held four meetings and organised three orientation encounters with local administration directors in the eastern, western and central governorates. The functions assigned to the Committee are as follows:

1. To evaluate the present situation with respect to national geographical names;
2. To formulate rules and norms for the writing of geographical names;
3. To adopt a romanization system for Arabic;
4. To promote studies and academic research in toponymy;
5. To develop relations with organisations concerned with toponymy.

## Jordan

### 1. Jordan Geographic Encyclopedia of Towns

The project is to be achieved and edited in separate parts, one for each governorate ( Muhafadha ). One part , Muhafadhat As-Zarqa is currently under printing, The field work has been done to Muhafadhat Ajlun. Muhafadhat Al-Balqa was printed in 1997 contains 272 pages, 17 maps ( Full pages) 62 maps ( part of page ) .

The Encyclopedia contains:

- a) General and various information concerning the Muhafadha.
- b) Information on each town, village, and agglomeration such as :  
Name, History, Location, Site, Suburbs (Ahya) ,Rivers and valleys (wadis) ,Mountains and areas, Population Local ,administrative, Services.

### 2. Gazetteer of Jordan

This work was, produced in Arabic and has already been entered into the computer. It is divided according to the main district (governorate) ( Muhafadha) and subdistricts ( Liwa, Qada).

It includes:

Name ( Arabic letters, Roman letters) , designation, coordinates.

### 3. Geographical Names Committee

- a) First, the Government of Jordan formed a National Committee for Geographical Names. The committee was Active for three years in the early 1980's
- b) Another committee was also formed at the Royal Jordanian geographic Center (RJGC) for the same purpose, and is still active today. RJGC has published a book in basics geographical names 1997 in Arabic (62) pages

### 4. Atlases:

- The first part of the National Atlas of Jordan "Climate and Agrohydrology" was published in 1984. It contains 135 maps.
- The second part of the National Atlas of Jordan "Hydrology and Agrohydrology" was published in 1986. It contains 141 maps, In addition of that a new updated and reviewed edition of the school atlas in Arabic was published in 1996.

### Libyan Arab Jamahiriya

In early 1980's ,an national geographical names committee was established in Libya to look into the standardisation of geographical names in the country and start a national gazetteer. The following are some of the responsibilities of this committee:

1. Performing of a national gazetteer.
2. Conduct necessary studies and research to unify geographical names in the country.
3. Help different Departments in the country in choosing names for unnamed places.
4. Performing a toponomic "Guide line" for maps of the country.
5. Contact national geographical names organisation in Arab and African countries and in other states to co-operate with them in this subject.

### Morocco

The Moroccan authorities attach special importance to the issues raised by the standardisation of geographical names. Their interest stems from an awareness of the role played by toponymy as an essential technical tool in the field of cartography and as a cultural element that reflects the historical particularity of the country and is a part of its cultural heritage.

The Department of Property Records, Land Survey and Cartography, the Moroccan agency that supervises the preparation and maintenance of the geodesic network and oversees cartographic coverage, has been making major efforts to standardise geographical

names. Over the past two years, the focus in toponymy has been on the three areas listed below.

1. The collection and processing of geographical names in connection with cartographic output, which can be summarised as follows:

- a) Revision or preparation of basic maps on scales of 1:25,000, 1:50,000 and 1:100,000;
- b) Revision or preparation of city maps on scales of 1:5,000 and 1:10,000;
- c) Publication of regional maps;
- d) Initiation of the preparation and production of a series of maps for mountain tourism;
- e) Review or publication of several topical maps.

2. Continuation of work on the production of the gazetteer for which specifications were presented at previous sessions of the Group of Experts. Fifteen sections have thus far been compiled, containing some 120,000 names.

3. A new experiment has begun in which the collection of geographical names in the field is assigned to private topographical contractors. If the experiment succeeds, this arrangement will be maintained and expanded in order to review the national inventory of geographical names within an short time.

### Oman

The National Survey Authority is responsible for the collection, processing and standardisation of geographical names in accordance with the national standards. The gazetteer is still in preparation.

### Saudi Arabia

The Survey Department of the Ministry of Defence and Aviation is the body responsible for producing and distributing topographical maps in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and is thus involved in the collection of geographical names.

There follows hereunder a brief overview of some of its activities relating to cartography and toponymy.

An ambitious project was recently completed for the production of digital maps at a scale of 1:250,000. In the course of the project, geographical names were collected in the field for all landmarks and natural features.

In view of the importance of geographical names, the Department has established a special toponymy division and has assigned to the task a technical working group trained in the methodology of collecting geographical names in the field and entering them in databases. A database of geographical names and landmarks has been built up that contains at the present time some 60,000 items, and it is constantly being expanded and revised. It is planned to use it within a comprehensive geographical information system (GIS).

The division is currently preparing an illustrated geographical dictionary that will define geographical features and phenomena.

The Department participated with other governmental agencies and local universities in a national team to produce a national historical atlas containing many illustrations and the geographical names of landmarks, and it was distributed locally. An attempt is now being made to transform it into a digital atlas so that it can conveniently be distributed on magnetic tape.

The names division, in co-operation with other governmental agencies, academic bodies and geographical groups such as the Saudi Geographical Society, is developing working procedures for handling geographical names in terms of their collection, documentation and use.

## Sudan

National committee for Sudanese geographical names was established in 1978 by a republican decision and amended many times as result of lack of funding . In 1998 the committee reestablished under new bases as independent body under the super vision of ministry of survey and physical development.

An important aims and purposes of the committee were site up:

1. setting a national standardized system for writing geographical names .
2. issuing a national dictionary for geographical names .
3. collecting and tracing the origins of geographical and historical names in Sudan .

despite the lack of financial support , the committee managed to achieved the following :

1. Revision of same maps.
2. Held two conferences in geographical names.
3. Correction of a number of names.
4. Naming of same roads.

## Syrian Arab Republic

Geographical names in Syria are adopted according to the following three factors

1. From ancient historical names inherited by generations and Syrian local inhabitants.
2. From ancient available maps.
3. From official authorities (ministry of tourism, ministry of local administration).

According to the above mentioned factors the adopted geographical names are placed on the series of maps which cover Syrian territory in 1:25000 scale map. Most of these names are of Arabic origins and are meaningful. However there are some exonyms going to be replaced by Arabic names i.e. Tel Kocheh becomes Al Yaaroubia.

In tourist maps of scale 1:5000 and 1:10000 names are put in English or in French language by adopting the amended Beirut transliteration system of 1972.

A national gazetteer prepared for Syria is considered a reliable reference and will be put in (CD) in order to facilitate revising, updating and handling. It is composed of five volumes and contains 14000 geographical names of cities, towns, villages, geographical and historical places in Syria with a full explanation of each name. This gazetteer was the fruit of fieldwork of 800 researchers through a supreme commission composed from Gen. Establishment of Surveying, Syrian Geographical Society, Damascus University and other scientific center.

## United Arab Emirates

In the United Arab Emirates, the geographical names of all natural, manmade and populated places features are field collected early 1980 using an aerial photography at scale of 1:30,000 for provisional names placement, then placed on 1:50,000 topographic maps by the Military Survey Department. The romanization of these names carried out with accordance to the amended Beirut transliteration system of 1972. The local people of each region are consulted to record the geographical names as their pronunciation. In 1994 all geographical names are digitally transferred along with maps to the National Topographic Database (NTDB) to allow querying according to cartographic structure. However, a national gazetteer is being prepared for much more detailed than the existing NTDB.