

**Twenty-Second Session of United Nations Group of Experts
on
Geographical Names**

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Report Submitted by the Islamic Republic of Iran

National Cartographic Center

**Iranian Committee for Standardization of Geographical
Names (ICSGN)**

P.O.BOX 13185-1684, Azadi Sq., Tehran, Iran

Tel: +98(21)6000031/37, Fax; +98(21)6001972

<http://www.geonames.ncc.org.ir>

Abstract:

The task of standardizing Iranian geographical names entered a new phase after the establishment of the Iranian Committee for Standardization of Geographical Names (ICSGN). The committee seeks, among its other duties, for the ways to integrate and coordinate all the related activities by others.

The present collection comprises the report on the prominent related activities on the part of the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran during the year 2003, which include the following:

- Establishment of six working groups of experts within ICSGN (namely, the *Transcription Working Group*, the *Website and Database of Geographical Names Working Group*, the *Historical Names Working Group*, the *Terminology of Geographical Names Working Group*, the *Exonyms Working Group*, and the *Marine and Under Sea Features Working Group*) to guarantee reliable programmings in relation to its undertakings;
 - Holding the *Second Conference on Standardization of Geographical Names* at National Cartography Center (NCC) headquarters, in May 2003;
 - Preparation of volumes of national gazetteers (10 for Khorasan province, 12 for Kerman Province and 8 for Hormozgan province) covering 28,463 geographical names (6,576 villages, 21,763 farmlands and 124 central cities and towns);
 - Programming for gazetteers for rivers of the Orumiyeh Lake, the Caspian Sea, and Central Iran basins;
 - Programming for virtual registration of the names for the rural areas of Iran in a computerized gazetteer, named *Computerized Data Reference Base for Rural Areas of Iran*;
 - Coordination of activities with other Iranian governmental and private section institutions interested in standardization of geographical names; and, finally,
 - Preparation of a new, scientifically justified, romanization system, as well as the related procedure, for transcription and standardization of Iranian geographical names.
- In what follows, the abovementioned will be explained briefly.

INTRODUCTION

The task of standardizing Iranian geographical names entered a new phase after the establishment of the Iranian Committee for Standardization of Geographical Names (ICSGN). The committee seeks, among its other duties, for the ways to integrate and coordinate all the related activities by others.

The present collection comprises the report on the prominent related activities on the part of the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran during the year 2003

I. ICSGN WORKING GROUPS

Based on the related plannings, ICSGN shall be supported, as its arms, by six bodies of experts in different fields related to the subject of standardization of geographical names, titled *working groups*. These working groups initiated their activities in 2003; the related reports are available to the committee.

The six ICSGN working groups and their undertakings are, briefly, as follows:

Transcription Working Group

Led by experts in linguistics and phonetics, the *Transcription Working Group* is responsible for preparation of scientifically justified procedures for transcription and transliteration of Iranian geographical names, ensuring their optimal applicabilities. The major undertakings of the *Transcription Working Group* include preparation and submission of the mentioned handbooks of instructions to the committee, as well as planning and organizing training courses for the interested institutions and organizations to learn and apply the approved procedures.

Empowered by approvals of a number of sessions by ICSGN leading board, for the time being, the *Transcription Working Group* has succeeded in submitting to ICSGN three procedures for standardization of geographical names, for final approval:

- Procedure for narrow transcription based on the capabilities of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), to prepare narrow transcriptions of Iranian geographical names,
- Procedure for broad transcription based on the potentials of the broad transcription system and alphabet proposed by the working group, to prepare broad transcriptions of Iranian geographical names,
- Procedure for transliteration to make records of the normal Persian spellings of Iranian geographical names based on accepted scientific norms of historical linguistics.

Website and Database of Geographical Names Working Group

ICSGN regards as one of its most important responsibilities the task of collecting and documenting the names of all geographical features of Iran. In this relation, a database has been foreseen to be established by the *Website and Database of Geographical Names Working Group* to meet the following needs:

- access to all geographical names,
- access to correct/native pronunciations of geographical names,
- access to tangible communications and collaborations with various institutions, bodies, or organizations, interested in geographical names,
- availability of reliable records of geographical names on maps, as well as other sources concerned with them.

The initial phase of preparation of such a database, comprising the process of setting standards for it, has been completed.

The ICSGN website is, for the time being, available at geonames.ncc.org.ir The homepage has been intended to present the reports and products of the various activities by ICSGN, to meet a considerable set of national and international needs in relation to Iranian geographical names.

Historical Names Working Group

Considering the significance of historical names in the process of reconstructing old languages and cultures, as well as their basic role in guiding political and nationalistic interests, the *Historical Names Working Group* has been foreseen within the structure of ICSGN to fulfill the needs in this respect. Collections, documentations, and investigations of geographical names from a historical point of view are among the major duties of this working group.

Terminology of Geographical Names Working Group

Having been fully aware of the vital importance of appropriate terminologies with transparent equivalents in the course of standardization of geographical names, ICSGN approved and enacted the preparation of a notebook of technical expressions related to the subject.

The *Terminology of Geographical Names Working Group* has, for the time being, the responsibility of compiling the mentioned notebook.

Exonyms Working Group

The *Exonyms Working Group* is the name given to the branch of ICSGN which is concerned with the task of collecting and documenting foreign geographical names (i.e. exonyms). NCC and the ICSGN affiliated to it must be regarded as holders of the initiation to collect and documents exonyms: the process had never attracted attentions in this regard before. In addition to enriching the data bank with new, valuable pieces of informations, the process shall, no doubt, have positive effects on other interested bodies, institutions, and organizations.

The activities of the *Exonyms Working Group* shall, finally, form a list of exonyms of Iran which will be submitted to UNGEGEN for utilization.

Marine and Under Sea Features Working Group

This most recently established working group within the overall structure of ICSGN shall be responsible for documentation of names of marine and under water geographical features of Iran. For the time being, the members of the working group are being elected and invited. Being organized in near future, the group will soon start its activities.

II. SECOND CONFERENCE ON STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

In May, 2003, the NCC succeeded in holding its Second Conference on Standardization of Geographical Names, simultaneous to its other conference on Geomatics. Various papers investigating the political, economical and social aspects of the issue of standardization were presented. The conference provided an opportunity for Iranian researchers, as well as chiefs of various executive parts, to

become aware of the various activities concerning the issue of standardization of geographical names.

III. Research on Geographical Names

Among its other activities, the ICSGN has succeeded in supporting the following research projects:

A) Investigation of Hydrographical Features of Iran

The report of this project, as well as a detailed list of its accomplishments, shall be available in near future, under the title "Hydronyms of Iran".

B) Research on Iranian Archaeological and Cultural Names

This research project is, for the time being, being guided through the final stages of revision and preparation of the related maps.

C) Investigation of Variations in the Usages of Names of Geographical Features

Passing the initial stages of being organized, the present research project shall be concerned with the issue of variations in the usages of different names for the same geographical features. The scope shall be the whole Iranian culture.

IV. NATIONAL GAZETTEERS

Preparation of pieces of geographical informations to be utilized in the process of compilation of national gazetteers of Iran has been introduced as one of the main objectives. In so doing, the ICSGN has succeeded in enforcing procedures to gather and process pieces of geographical informations in relation to the rural areas of Iran to be published in the form of gazetteers, atlases and geographical information systems, while following its main duties which concern preparation of base maps of the country in different scales, especially the 1:50000 and 1:25000 ones. Initiated during the 2002-2003 period, this phase of activities resulted in gathering geographical informations in relation to Khorasan province, which included informations about 1987 villages, 8131 farmlands and other locations, as well as 33 city and town centers. For the time being, ten volumes of gazetteers encompassing the mentioned geographical informations are being prepared; these will be available in near future. During the same period, 12 volumes of gazetteers were compiled in relation to the rural areas of Kerman province. Covering 12 volumes of gazetteers, the set includes information about 3130 villages, 11353 farmlands and similar rural points, as well as 61 central cities and towns.

To these a third collection under preparation must be added in relation to Hormozgan province. The set shall be prepared in the form of eight volumes of gazetteers and will cover informations about 1459 villages, 2279 farmlands and similar rural areas, as well as 30 central cities and towns.

For the time being, the overall number of the geographical names investigated, in this relation, throughout the country amount to 28,463 items, which include 6576 names for villages, 21,763 titles for farmlands, as well as 124 names for central cities and towns. These names have been, then, accompanied by additional pieces of geographical information, which shall be available both in printed gazetteers and within the structure of geographical information system (GIS) software.

The other activity of the organization in this relation concerns compilation of gazetteers of rivers and basins. For the time being, the organization has succeeded in publishing gazetteers of the Orumiyeh Lake and the Caspian Sea basins. In addition to these, gazetteers of rivers of the Central Iran basin, under printing, and gazetteers of

the Persian Gulf, Eastern Iran and Gharaghoom basins, all under preparation, are worth mentioning. The collection shall include all the related pieces of geographical informations, as well as thematic maps (topography, hydrography, etc.), together with the names and specifications of 18,000 geographical items.

To the abovementioned a published collection of five volumes of gazetteers about Iranian islands in Persian Gulf must be added. NCC must be regarded as holder of the initiative in this relation, since no other collection is available in relation to the mentioned islands.

V. OTHER ACTIVITIES

Similar activities by other Iranian organizations have been accomplished in relation to geographical names. In this relation the activities by the Iranian Ministry of Post, Telegraph and Telephone, the Statistics Center of Iran, as well as the Iranian Ministry of Agriculture and Jihad are worth mentioning.

As far as the Iranian Ministry of Post, Telegraph and Telephone is concerned, the related duties and responsibilities have guided this governmental body to establish a data-bank for Iranian rural areas and their related codes.

The major part of the activities accomplished by the Iranian Ministry of Agriculture and Jihad are relatable to the measures by the affiliated Center for Research on Rural Issues. These measures encompass the activities related to the issue of preparation of a standard plan for a database for geographical names.

In this same relation, the results of a research project is, for the time being, available in the form of a computerized data reference of the rural areas of Iran. The project encompasses the whole set of geographical informations about Iranian rural areas gathered during the period 1944-1996 in 14 rounds of census making. The database gathers, classifies and processes all the related informations regarding the following:

- village
- inhabited village
- permanently inhabited village
- seasonally inhabited village
- unresidential village
- deserted village
- farm
- dependent farm
- independent farm
- residential farm
- unresidential farm
- seasonal residential farm
- dependent place
- independent place
- residential place
- unresidential place
- permanent residential place
- seasonal residential place
- place
- deserted place / abandoned place
- farming stock company
- minor point
- town

The database presents variations in reference, by name, to various rural areas which resulted from different orientations of each of the mentioned 14 rounds of census making regarding standard definitions.

A similar project and database has been prepared by the Statistics Center of Iran in relation to the names of residential places throughout the country. The duties of the Statistics Center (the governmental institution responsible to carry out census rounds) have provided it with detailed specifications of all residential places throughout the country. However, no activity has yet been initiated by this governmental body to transcribe and standardize the collected geographical names.

Other activities related to the task of standardization of geographical names have been carried out by the private sector. Here, a number of maps of the world, the middle east, as well as other areas, have been prepared and published. An encyclopaedia, in 600 pages, is another related product of this sector. In all these activities, the task of transcribing the geographical names has been considered. Specifically, the mentioned encyclopaedia registers the latest changes in the overall map of the world, especially, Central Asia and the Middle East, together with the standardized transcriptions of toponymic items, of course, to the extent available.

The other valuable product of the private section, from the point of view of this report, is a gazetteer of mountains and rivers of Iran. The collection provides its readers with transcriptions of the names of rivers as well as useful informations about them, as reflected in the included profiles of mountain areas.

VI. MISCELLANEOUS ACTIVITIES

Finally, the following miscellaneous activities are worth mentioning in the present report:

1. Updating the basic maps of the country with the help of satellite images provided by IRS (Indian Remote Sensing Satellites) at a station in Varamin, Tehran province;
2. Updating 1/25,000 maps as well as NTDB;
3. Establishment of digital geographical information systems (DGIS's);
4. Preparation of provincial atlases of Iran;
5. Preparation of hydrographic maps of the Persian Gulf;
6. Initiation and providing support for the Caspian Sea hydrographic project;
7. Updating the National Atlas of Iran.

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Division Report

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Seventh United Nations Divisional Meeting on Standardization of Geographical Names in South-west Asia

The Seventh United Nations Divisional Meeting on Standardization of Geographical Names in South-west Asia was held on October 21 & 22, 2003, at National Cartography Center (NCC) headquarters, Tehran, Iran. The meeting was attended by delegations from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Cyprus, as well as representatives of the Azerbaijani and Turkish embassies.

Peripheral to the main meeting, an exhibition was held, too, in which some available historical maps of Iran, as well as the reports and products of the activities in relation to standardization of geographical names were presented. The items exhibited included gazetteers, maps and databases for geographical names among others.

The Afghan delegates asked for collaborations on the parts of other nations in the process of reviving the Afghan role in the process of standardization of Afghanistan's geographical names and reconstruction of the country's base maps.

The aim of the meeting was declared to be promotion of all activities related to standardization of the geographical names related to the member states.

Following the opening ceremonies and the proceedings related to the opening of the exhibition, the delegation from South-west Asian countries submitted its report. The discussions, then led to the chairman of Iranian Committee for Standardization of Geographical Names (ICSGN)'s presenting a detailed report on the activities by the committee.

The meeting was, then, concluded in a resolution emphasizing more and closer collaborations between the countries of South-west Asia on the issues of interest.

Resolution of Seventh United Nations Divisional Meeting on Standardization of Geographical Names in South-west Asia, October 20 & 21, 2003
National Cartography Center (NCC)
Tehran, Iran

Following two days of discussions by member states, the Seventh United Nations Divisional Meeting on Standardization of Geographical Names in South-west Asia, held on October 20 & 21, 2003, at the National Cartography Center (NCC), Tehran, Iran, is hereby concluded with the following resolution:

1. Regarding Resolution No. 9 of the 8th Conference on Standardization of Geographical Names in Berlin, considering the significance of ancient geographical names as an aspect of human cultural heritage, the meeting, hereby, suggests prevention of substitutions of such names with new ones. Especially important, in this relation, shall be the ancient names in common use among several nations.
2. The results of the activities by ICSGN's working groups, in particular the *Exonyms Working Group* and the *Terminology of Geographical Names Working Group*, are to be submitted to the United Nations Conference on Standardization of Geographical Names.
3. Regarding the necessity of closer and speedier communications among member states, a permanent secretariat is hereby proposed to be erected in Tehran to facilitate the job of standardization of geographical names to be pursued effectively.
4. Regarding the fact that such activities as map production and standardization of geographical names had been hindered in Afghanistan for a considerable period of time, the member states are hereby asked to provide the country with aids of various kinds, such as sending agents, among others, to help it revive such activities.
5. In order for the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to be able to provide a comprehensive report on the developments on standardization of geographical names, the member states are hereby asked to provide it, at the end of the current year, with their national reports on standardization of geographical names.
6. The member states, hereby, agree upon developing their own homepages of geographical names to promote the task of information exchange in the areas of interest.
7. Regarding the crucial role of training in effective exchanges of information, the member states hereby agree upon holding training courses on the areas of interest related to geographical names. The member states, hereby, agree upon publishing lists of their geographical names in the form of gazetteers.
8. In order for the member states to be all aware of the approved types and methods of recording and transcribing geographical names utilized by other member states, it is, hereby, decided for member states to provide the Permanent Secretariat of Meeting in Tehran (cf. Paragraph 3 above) with a list of 50 geographical names of important features of their respected countries, not later than 3 months from the date of

conclusion of this seventh meeting. The following post and e-mail addresses are hereby announced for the Permanent Secretariat of Meeting in Tehran:
National Cartography Center, P.O.Box 13185-1684, Meraj Bld, Azadi Square, Tehran, Iran

Tel: ++98(21)6000031-7

Fax: ++98(21)6001972

E-mail: Maghsoudi1@yahoo.com

Geoname@ncc.neda.net.ir

9. The delegates hereby express their appreciation of the Iranian side's hardworking and hospitality during the time the meeting was held.