

**Twenty-third Session  
Vienna, 28 March – 4 April 2006**

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**Item 14 of the Provisional Agenda:  
Activities relating to the Working Group  
on Exonyms**

**The Database of French language exonyms  
(Translation of “ La base de données des exonymes de langue française ”)**

## **Database of French-language Exonyms**

The French-language exonyms database project stems from a resolution by the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names urging toponym authorities throughout the world to collaborate to standardize the processing of the corpus of exonyms they are using.

In the wake of this resolution, the French-speaking Division of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) began, in 2000, to consider the introduction of a project involving a list or atlas of French-language exonyms.

The project quickly took shape and, in March 2001, was the subject of a collaborative protocol established between the Commission de toponymie du Québec, Canada, and the Commission nationale de toponymie de France, which decided to pool their respective databases of foreign toponyms and work together to develop a common Francophone position within international toponymic authorities.

To maintain ties with the members of the UNGEGN working group on exonyms, whose mandate is to make rules governing the use of such names, the French-speaking Division, for its part, included a follow-up to this activity in its program of work for 2002-2007. The database will therefore be developed in accordance with the instructions issued by the working group on exonyms.

Computer system development was done by Benoît Boisvert, a computer specialist with the Commission de toponymie du Québec, and Daniel Hazard, a computer specialist with the Institut géographique national de France. Mr. Hazard passed away in 2005, and we wish to pay special tribute to him for his dedicated work. The information technology infrastructure is supported by the Commission de toponymie du Québec, which hosts the database within the Web site of the French-speaking Division of UNGEGN.

Thanks to the steadfast commitment of two expert toponymists, Henri Dorion (Quebec, Canada) and Sylvie Lejeune (France), bolstered by invaluable support from experienced colleagues such as Mr. Perrichet, the Commission de toponymie du Québec and the Commission nationale de toponymie de France are inputting data into the database. Differences in the data from the various authorities consulted (Commission de toponymie du Québec, Commission nationale de toponymie, Foreign Affairs Canada, the Institut géographique national, etc.) are minimized as much as possible, and those that remain are identified in the database. The forms selected are therefore based on a broad consensus.

The body of French-language exonyms collected to date comprises 4,000 names. Since the 22<sup>nd</sup> session of UNGEGN, held in New York City in April 2004, approximately one hundred new exonyms have been validated and will be distributed on the Web, bringing to 1,000 — and very soon to 1,500 — the number of exonyms on the Web site of the French-speaking Division at <[http://www.divisionfrancophone.org/recherche\\_bd.htm](http://www.divisionfrancophone.org/recherche_bd.htm)>.

Currently, the French exonyms on the Web are accompanied by the following information: the official local name (endonym), the language of the endonym, the ISO language code, the country where the entity in question is located, the ISO country code and the class (topographic feature, hydrographic feature, populated place, etc.) and type (cape, archipelago, lake, country, capital, etc.) of the entity. A search engine queries the database based on this information.

The database of French exonyms is primarily intended for Francophone users of toponyms who require reliable information on geographical names, e.g., atlas editors, publishers of documentation intended for tourists, as well as the print and electronic media. In addition to its usefulness in providing the exact spelling of names—both exonyms and official local names (endonyms)—the database is part of the worldwide Francophone heritage: the French-language geographical nomenclature of the world.

Danielle Turcotte, Director and Secretary  
Commission de toponymie du Québec  
Canada  
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