

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

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**Item 5 of the Provisional Agenda:  
Reports of the divisions**

**National Activities in Standardization of Geographical Names**

## **National Activities in Standardization of Geographical Names**

According to the report submitted to the 22<sup>nd</sup> session, national activities regarding standardization of geographical names in Iran have entered a new phase since the establishment of the Expert Committee for Standardization of Geographical Names in 1990. Indeed, the mentioned committee was organized to congregate and harmonize all activities for standardization of geographical names and has successfully taken useful steps.

### **1- Working Groups Activities**

The working groups of the expert committee are in fact the main arms of nomination and standardization of geographical names. In the following parts we state the working groups' activities since the 22<sup>nd</sup> session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.

#### **1-1- The working group on Transcription**

This group which has the duty of compiling specifications for transcription and transliteration of geographical names is also responsible in supervising its desirable implementation. The group has provided a general transcription guidebook in its recent activities. This guidebook can be used as a good reference and training manual for transcription. In this guidebook necessary information about recording geographical names and some probable difficulties about recording geographical names have been stated.

On the other hand, because the dialectal variations in the country are beyond the capabilities of the alphabetical transcription system, the working group created a method to cover most of these names.

The result was an appendix for different local dialects, which was added at the end of the transcription guidebook

#### **1-2- Working group on geographical names database and website**

This working group has the following two major activities:

##### **1-2-1- The Geographical names database**

Gathering, recording and transcribing geographical features are the main objectives of the Expert Committee for Standardization of Geographical Names of Iran. Creating a database

with the potential to search for geographical names of different geographical features in the country is a necessity which is useful to all organizations. This database will also contain the correct pronunciation of the features and other spatial characteristics. It also facilitates communications, business, planning and preparation of maps, atlases, etc.

The general processes for making a database for geographical names of Iran include:

- Creating a suitable structure for the geographical names database of Iran,
- Preparing the necessary software for the database,
- Data entry.

Among the above mentioned stages, stage one and stage two have been accomplished. We are now in the third stage. In this stage we enter all information about geographical names prominent at 1:25000 scale into the system. The information includes: geographical feature name, geographical feature kind, transcription of the feature's name, coordinates, the administrative division, location of the geographical features on base maps, GNDB code, NTDB code, specific code for geographical features, feature's name in Latin alphabet, elevation, name of compiler, name of controller.

By now, 3000 geographical names and their related specifications have been entered into the system. It is also possible to execute different queries.

### **1-2-2- Website of the Committee for Standardization of Geographical Names of Iran**

This website has been created since 2004 and can be accessed from the following address:  
<http://www.geonames.ncc.org.ir>

In this website different news about the Geographical Names Committee can be seen. In addition, one can observe the duties of the working groups. Also the resolutions and specifications of the Iranian transcription system can be observed. There is also the possibility of searching the entered geographical names and administrative boundaries.

### **1-3- Working group on historical names**

There are many historical names in Iran which have been changed during the past centuries for different reasons. Therefore, their forms and existing pronunciations differ from the ones which have been widespread in the past periods in history.

According to the approvals of the United Nations 8th Conference on Standardization of Geographical Names, historical names have been identified as the human heritage, so, paying attention to these names is one of the priorities of the Committee for Geographical Names. The most important priorities for historical names are:

- historical names of provinces,

- historical names of important cities,
- historical names of important natural features,
- historical names of important manmade features,
- historical names of other natural features.

#### **1-4- Working group on terminology of geographical names**

The careful use of the terms used in standardization of geographical names is very important. The terms should be used correctly, in suitable places, and their equivalents should be identified.

The working group of terminology, according to its approved duties, has begun different activities. The group members include: linguists, geographers and philologists. They have begun their job by translating geographical terms. The group began to translate the last version of: "List of terms for standardization of geographical names", which was prepared by the United Nations Working Group on Geographical Names Terminology. This list has been translated in 6 different international languages in 2002. The mentioned list consists of 375 current terms for standardization of geographical names.

Some of the terms have scientific equivalents in the Persian language. The equivalents for other terms have been suggested by some translators. The working group for terminology has selected the most current meanings as their equivalents in English.

The basis for the workgroup's work was translation of the English source. This is the same process followed by the United Nations in translating the list from English into other languages.

Some other terms in this list had no Persian equivalents and have been used as they were. These are new scientific terms with no Persian equivalents for them.

The terminology group has tried to find suitable equivalents for these terms, although it is not their main duty.

#### **1-5- Working group on Exonyms**

Preparing a list for the names of different countries according to the last approvals of the United Nations Conference on Standardization of Geographical Names has always been one of the main objectives of the Committee for Standardization of Geographical Names. So, an exonym working group was formed and began with investigating all existing sources. The names of 192 countries which were on the list of the United Nations were investigated by this group. They did their best to gather correct information about the country names mentioned. A list of country names was prepared which included information such as: official name, complete name, current name, local name, official language, the standard codes of the countries, the names of the countries in Persian, along with their transcription. There is also

information in the list about the capitals of these countries such as: the official name of the capitals, the name of the capitals in the Persian language, and their transcription .

After presenting the list to the committee for review, discussion and control, the committee approved this list as Version 1.0. The List contains valuable information that can be used by the mass media, map suppliers, different ministries and organizations, and all people who are somehow dealing with country names and are in search for a reliable source.

### **1-6- Working group on marine and sea-bed names**

This group identifies marine and undersea features along the north and south seashores of Iran.

In the near future, the group will present a collection of marine and undersea names to the Expert Committee for Nomination and Standardization of Geographical Names.

### **2- The 3rd national conference and exhibition on standardization of geographical names**

This conference was held in November 2005 at the National Cartographic Centre of Iran. Several papers about political, economical, social, and historical aspects of geographical names were presented. This conference was an opportunity for authorities and researchers to become familiar with the different activities of the Committee on Standardization of Geographical Names.

The conference was held in three separate sessions and the main discussions were about the following topics:

- name of the Persian Gulf
- standardization of geographical names.
- historical background of geographical names.

This conference was greatly welcomed by participants and visitors. Many of the papers were presented in poster form. There was also an exhibition of historical maps mainly about the Persian Gulf and its historical name. Other different activities about standardization of geographical names, made by different organizations and ministries, were shown in the exhibition.

### **3- Publication of Iranian hydronyms**

In addition to its current activities and duties, the Committee for Geographical Names has given priority to the publication of scientific and theoretical books related to geographical

names. For this purpose, a book titled: "Toponymy Basis and the Toponyms of Iran" was published and presented to the experts in the conference.

In this respect, the committee of geographical names has published a second book in this series titled: "Iran hydronyms". In this book the theoretical and scientific aspects of hydronyms of Iran have been discussed.

It is a reference book which explains the specifications of hydronyms of Iran, and has been written by one of the experts of this committee.

#### **4- Establishing short-term training courses**

One of the main objectives of the Expert Committee Geographical for Standardization of Geographical Names is to direct how to gather, record and transcribe geographical names according to existing specifications, therefore short-term training courses have been established. In these courses, the participants are familiarized with the different methods of gathering, recording and transcribing of geographical names. In fact there are many different organs in Iran which are somehow related to geographical names. Establishment of such courses is a necessary action in order to assist those involved with these methods. The committee hopes to establish more comprehensive courses in the near future.

#### **5- Transcribing the names of country division units**

Due to the vast usage of country division names in the mass media, correspondence, and documents, the committee has begun transcribing the names of approximately 7000 geographical names. In the near future this information can be accessed publicly by referring to the committee's website.

#### **6- Planning education programs on geographical names for related disciplines in universities**

Education programs on the different aspects of geographical names can help students of different universities gain a better understanding of this concept. Therefore training programs are to be drafted for teaching geographical names in some universities.