

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

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**Item 15 of the Provisional Agenda:  
Activities relating to the Working Group  
on Pronunciation**

**Report of the Working Group on Pronunciation**

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**Prepared by Dónall Mac Giolla Easpaig (Ireland), Working Group on  
Pronunciation.**

## **Report of the Working Group on Pronunciation**

The Working Group on Pronunciation was formed in response to resolution 11 of the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (Berlin, 27 August - 5 September 2002), which noted that the transliteration of geographical names from the script of one language into another script, such as romanization, does not normally provide a guide to the correct pronunciation of such names by persons who are unacquainted with the source language.

Three Working Papers were presented at the Meeting of the Working Group on Pronunciation at the twenty-second Session of UNGEGN (New York, 20-29 April 2004). Working paper No. 1, presented by Prof. Naftali Kadmon of the East Mediterranean Division (other than Arabic), addressed the need for national pronunciation guides for geographical names and recommended a number of steps towards a solution. The paper proposed that the work be undertaken on a phased basis; in phase one, countries would prepare pronunciation guides for their geographical names for speakers of English; these would be followed in the second phase by similar guides for all three working languages of the United Nations, English, French and Spanish. Working Paper No. 2, a pronunciation guide for Hebrew geographical names for English by the same expert, offered a template which could be used for other languages. Working paper No. 22, from the China Division, on the problems of characters and the pronunciation of Chinese geographical names, gave an indication of the complexity of the subject of pronunciation.

The Working Group held an informal meeting during the twenty-second Session at which various issues pertaining to the subject were discussed. Discussion centred in particular on the complexity of the issue of pronunciation of geographical names at both national and international level. The meeting decided to examine further Professor Kadmon's proposal in Working Paper No. 1 that countries should prepare national pronunciation guides to geographical names. Discussion also touched on the availability of pronunciation guides in spoken form and on how these might be of use to the work of the Group.

There is a need at this point for the Working Group to establish direction to its activity and to draw up a work plan for implementation before the Ninth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. To this end it is proposed that the Working Group hold at least one informal meeting during the twenty-third Session and another between then and the next Conference, in late 2006 or early 2007.

The proposed work plan would focus on the issues relating to pronunciation mentioned above and would specify practical means for addressing these. The plan would provide guidelines for the preparation of national pronunciation tables of geographical names and address the issue of the representation of sounds in such tables, on the question of whether to use the alphabet of the International Phonetic Association (IPA) or an alternative, simplified, notational system aimed at the general public, or both. The plan would also address the issue of providing the pronunciation element for the planned UNGEGN web accessible toponymic database.

### **Membership of the Working Group**

All experts are welcome to participate in the Working Group. The following is a list of the current membership:

**Convenor:**

**Dónall Mac Giolla Easpaig** (Ireland)

**Members:**

Herman **Bell** (Sudan)

Menelaos **Christodoulou** (Cyprus)

Randall **Flynn** (United States)

Isolde **Hausner** (Austria)

Naftali **Kadmon** (Israel)

Ki-Suk **Lee** (Republic of Korea)

Lucie **Moller** (South Africa)

Leif **Nilsson** (Sweden)

Roger **Payne** (United States)

Gerd **Quinting** (United States)

Joern **Sievers** (Germany)