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Item 8 of the Provisional Agenda

Activities relating to the Working Group on Training Courses in Toponymy

Toponymy workshop of Tunis: A road map to orient the activities of the national committee of toponymy

Submitted by Tunisia*

^{*} Prepared by Naima Friha, UNGEGN Vice Chair, Centre National de la Cartographie et de la Télédétection, Tunisia

Toponymy workshop of Tunis: A road map to orient the activities of the national committee of toponymy**

Summary

In the framework of the activities of the Tunisian National Committee of Toponymy (NCT)-created by Decree No.1299 on 26th February 2013), a toponymic workshop was organised in Tunis from 12-16 January 2015 with the collaboration of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), The United Nations Statistical Division (UNSD) and the National Centre for Cartography and Remote Sensing (CNCT) on behalf of the Ministry of National Defense of Tunisia.

The workshop which was essentially organised to train the newly appointed members of the committee covered 3 main topics: a training session, a fieldwork and a technical assistance to draw a road map for the NCT upcoming activities.

The main issues defined in the road map were the creation of sub-committees; the setting up of a logo, a website for the NCT as well as toponymic brochures to sensitize people about the importance of the geographical names standardization and the role of the national committee of toponymy in that. The setting up of multipurpose toponymic database was also defined as a key tool of the NCT road map.

Toponymy workshop of Tunis: A road map to orient the activities of the national committee of toponymy

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The workshop that was essentially organised to train the newly appointed members of the committee, was attended by 25 persons including four UNGEGN lecturers, two African UNGEGN experts and nineteen CNT members representing different ministries and public/private sectors,

The workshop has covered 3 main topics: a training session, a fieldwork and a technical assistance to draw a road map for the NCT upcoming activities.

- The **training session** included lectures about geographical names issues reinforced by examples about the experiences in the field from participating countries with a glance on some toponymic achievements in Africa.
- Conducted in a rich historical area, the **field collection** of place names tackled issues like procedures for toponymic field collection as well as the role of names' standardisation. Assisted by guides from the ministry of culture (National Institute of Patrimony), the place names origins, meanings and evolution through centuries have been highlighted providing good opportunity to go deeply in the cultural heritage aspect of the area place names.
 - Examples of names on road panels and unnamed places demonstrated a lack of standardization and data inconsistency that may affect sectors like the tourism'activity around those places.
- The missions of the NCT have divided under themes and dedicated groups have held intensive meetings to sketch the outlines of the **roadmap** accordingly.

Since the holding of the workshop, 5 meetings were organized to further develop and implement the roadmap and 5 sub-committees were created under the CNT to handle the following issues: Legislation and principles for naming; toponymy standardization and terminology glossary; toponymic databases; communication/sensitization and publication; international relations/cooperation and capacity building. of the sub-committees. The following points have been set up as the backbone of the road map and their implementation is smoothly progressing:

- a. Several principles related to naming places aspects like: names regulated by a legal text, names adopted by general usage, historical names, linguistic forms and transliteration, entity' nomination in its whole extent, use of personal names, criteria for naming selection, names formulation, spelling uniformity, recurring names, generic terminology, names abbreviation, naming of small entities have been defined.
- b. A questionnaire on geographical names was prepared and distributed in the ministries and bodies members of the NCT. The objective of this questionnaire was to scan the status of geographical names in the country and to seek people opinion on the importance of standardized geographical names in their domains of application and their perception on issues related to geographical names. Their contribution was expected to help informing the committee members on how efficient the standardization could be for them. Unluckily, few have answered the survey and the received inputs were not as satisfactory as they were expected showing the low concern given to geographical names issue.
- c. A ministerial circular recalling, with reference to Article 3 of the Decree of the CNT creation, the obligation to take the committee agreement before any place name attribution. Exception was made for the martyrs whose names are automatically given to places in tribute to their homeland sacrifice.
- d. Collection of all legal texts related to places naming.
- e. Creation of a logo for the national committee of toponymy



f. Establishment of a toponymic brochure in Arabic and French languages to be distributed in the educational institutions with main objective to raise people awareness about the role of geographical names, the importance of their standardisation and the role of the NCT in handling those issues.







g. Creation of a website for the committee: Created under the portal of the Ministry of National Defense, it will serve, inter alia, as a quick communication tool to set forth the geographical names issues, to report on the NCT activities and share exploits/opinions on the topic (its approval by a dedicated committee is in progress).

Among the information and relevant documents that can be consulted through the website are those about the committee, its organization chart, its meetings and findings, the legal texts on geographical names, related links, the work agenda and special events in relation to the committee activities.



h. Establishment of a toponymic database based, in a starting time, on 1/250.000 scale maps that cover the whole country and with first focus to solve the "toponymic disorder" particularly at the spelling level. The above mentioned scale has been chosen given the availability of relevant data which still needs to be sorted out and structured.

As this database is expected to be a multipurpose toponymic database solutions, bigger scales will be later on elaborated in order to cover different projects including the on-going National Geospatial Information Infrastructure, a challenging national project launched by the National Centre for Cartography and Remote Sensing .

The following are the referenced resolutions for this WP:

- I /4: National standardization
- V/15: Establishment of national geographical names authorities
- V/6: Promotion of national and international geographical names standardization programs
- $\mathbb{N}/2$: Acceleration of work on standardization of geographical names

I /20 : Exchange of experience

IV/6: Course in toponymy

▼X/10: Support for training and publications

Ⅷ/2: Commemorative naming practices for geographical features

I /7 : Regional meetings

X/10: Support for the work on the standardization of geographical names.