

Ad Hoc Group of Experts on
the Standardization of
Geographical Names

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STRUCTURE AND ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS GROUP
OF EXPERTS ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

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Two and a half year's experience after the Geneva Conference confirmed the necessity of realization of Resolution 1 adopted by the Conference (United Nations Permanent Commission on Geographical Names). The United Nations is the most representative international organization possessing an immediate interest in the normalization of geographical names and displaying possibilities for the accomplishment of such work.

As is known Committee IV of the Geneva Conference recommended to create a Permanent Commission on Geographical Names consisting of a body of experts representing different countries or geographical linguistic regions that should meet periodically, and a continuously functioning executive body - a Secretariat.

However, as Mr. Burrill, chairman of our Group of Experts, informed me in his letter of October 21, 1969, the United Nations could not finance the creation of any new bodies, including the Permanent Commission on Geographical Names, and the Economic and Social Council suggested that our Group of Experts should take upon itself the responsibilities of the proposed Permanent Commission

In our opinion, the following problems may be referred to as being of primary significance :

(i) - the working out of principles and procedures for establishment and recommendations for international usage of names of geographical features beyond a single sovereignty and of features situated in oceans and international waters;

(ii) - the working out of general principles and rules for rendering names from one writing system into another;

(iii) - the collection and dissemination of information on the methods and results of the activities of national and international bodies dealing with geographical names.

Therefore, we should consider carefully what we can do in such circumstances and how we can organize our work.

Since there is a great many problems that should be studied and solved it is probably expedient to choose a limited number of the most urgent problems, the solution of which many countries are interested in and which is impossible without the United Nations.

It is reasonable to entrust the examination of these problems or their components parts to working groups of specialists, purposely formed, under the leadership of one of the members of the United Nations Group of Experts. Such groups could be composed of the representatives of the countries immediately interested in solving a problem. In some cases necessary investigation

and elaboration of draft propositions may be charged to national names authorities or geographical names services of individual countries.

Draft propositions prepared in such a way should be submitted first to a regular session of the Group of Experts and after that to United Nations Conferences on the standardization of geographical names for broad discussion and final acceptance.

As far as the principle of formation of the group of Experts is concerned, the recommendation of Committee IV of the Geneva Conference that a representative of each of 14 geographical-linguistic regions should be included in the group proves well grounded. The representatives of the countries pertaining to certain regions and having agreed which of them will represent the region should be included in the Group of Experts. The right to appoint experts, naturally, belongs to the Government of a country.

There can be no doubt that the activities of the Group of Experts can be efficient only if the United Nations Secretariat and, particularly, the Cartography Section of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs render them practical and technical assistance.