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THIRD UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE  
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

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REPORT ON THE PROGRESS MADE IN THE STANDARDIZATION OF  
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Paper presented by the People's Republic of China

This is the first time the Chinese delegation attends the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. First of all, we would like to outline our views on the work of international standardization of geographical names.

At present, countries want independence, nations want liberation, and the people want revolution - this has become the irresistible trend of history. The world situation is developing in a direction favourable to the people of the world. We are glad to see that many countries have developed their national economies and cultures and also made gratifying progress in standardizing their geographical names after shaking off colonial rule and achieving independence.

We hold that the work of international standardization of geographical names must be carried out with the aim of facilitating economic and cultural exchanges and friendly co-operation among the people of all countries. Therefore, a reasonable solution of the questions concerned should be sought through full consultations without imposing one's views upon others, still less is it permissible to use standardization of geographical names as a pretext to encroach on the sovereignty of other countries and interfering in their own affairs.

We have always maintained that all countries, big or small, should be equal. The affairs of a country should be handled by its own people, and the affairs of an international organization should be managed jointly by its members. The international standardization of geographical names should be based on the national standardization of geographical names of each country. In standardizing romanized geographical names, the opinion of sovereign countries concerned should be respected. The standard Roman spellings chosen by each country for the names of geographical places within its sovereign jurisdiction should be adopted as part of the international standard. The international standard names of geographical features common to two or more countries should be agreed on by the countries concerned through consultations. The standardization of names of geographical features in international areas beyond national jurisdiction should be agreed on by all countries through consultations.

China is a socialist country and also a developing country belonging to the third world. In the past, the people of China and those of most other countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America had a common lot, being subjected alike to prolonged imperialist aggression and oppression. In order to plunder our treasures and wealth and enslave our people, the imperialists used different means to probe military and economic information of our country, illegally surveyed and mapped many parts of China, wilfully altered our geographical names or designated our places behind the backs of the Chinese people. As a result, there used to be some Chinese geographical names imposed upon us by imperialists that were associated with foreign aggression, and there are cases where several names exist for the same feature. These are harmful to China's sovereignty and national dignity. In romanizing Chinese geographical names, the imperialists contrived as they pleased several systems for transliterating Han characters to suit their own needs and their own ways. This resulted in a welter of romanized spellings of Chinese geographical names. Not only is a place name spelt differently in different foreign languages using the Roman alphabet, but also in the same foreign language. These spelling systems are unscientific and cannot correctly convey the standard pronunciation of the Chinese language. As is well known, geographical names are constantly used in communication among peoples. The coexistence of several names for a feature and several romanized spellings for a name is detrimental to friendly exchanges between nations and the promotion of economic and cultural development.

The Chinese people's great leader Chairman Mao Tsetung and the Chinese Government have all along attached importance to the work of standardization of geographical names. After nationwide liberation, a great deal of investigations about our geographical names were made by relying on the toponymists and the broad masses and it was decided, with the approval of our Government, to abolish or alter old names that were wrong and improper. To uphold our country's sovereignty and national independence, we abolished those geographical names tinged with colonialism that were given by imperialists during their aggression against China. To give effect to our policy of equality and solidarity of all the nationalities in our country, we carefully checked and changed those geographical names left over by the past governments which implied discrimination against, or insult to, minority nationalities. In the spirit of proletarian internationalism, we altered those geographical names left over by history which were

tinged with big-power chauvinism. Along with the development of our socialist construction and surveying undertaking, large numbers of new geographical names have appeared. The formulation of new names and the editing of old ones constitute the first step in our work of standardizing Chinese geographical names.

Chairman Mao Tsetung pointed out: "The Chinese written language must be reformed in the direction of adopting a phonetic alphabet as is common with the languages of the world." He also pointed out that a lot of work should be done in preparation for the romanization of the Han characters; before their romanization, Han characters must be simplified in the interest of present use and at the same time preparations should be actively made. According to Chairman Mao's instructions, our Government published in 1956 the Scheme for Simplifying Han Characters. On this basis, the Committee for Reforming the Chinese Written Language compiled a Comprehensive Glossary of Simplified Characters, thus creating favourable conditions for the standardization of the Han written form of geographical names. In 1958 our Government published the Scheme for a Chinese Phonetic Alphabet, which had been approved by the fifth session of the First National People's Congress. The scheme adopts the Roman alphabet, which is used by most countries of the world, to spell the Chinese (Han) language, providing good conditions for the standardization of romanized Chinese geographical names. Our esteemed and beloved late Premier Chou En-lai attached great importance to this matter. He pointed out: "The Scheme for a Chinese Phonetic Alphabet can be used to transcribe the names of Chinese persons and places in documents, books and newspapers dealing with other countries." In the last twenty years, according to Premier Chou's instruction, the Chinese people have used the Chinese phonetic alphabet to spell large numbers of Chinese geographical names. Now this alphabet is already in use in spelling the names of domestic post and telegraph offices, weather stations, railway stations and city streets and in investigating and recording minority nationality place names by the surveying department. In recent years, an Atlas of the People's Republic of China and Nautical Charts in Chinese phonetic spelling and other materials have been published in China, which are well received at home and abroad. Dictionaries published in our country, in which Han characters are annotated with the Chinese alphabet, provide the basis of pronunciation for the romanization of Han place names. With a view to accurately conveying the pronunciation of minority nationality languages, we have drawn up the Rules for Transliterating Minority Nationality Place Names with the Chinese Phonetic Alphabet.

The above is a general picture of our work in standardizing Chinese geographical names.

China is a developing country. Although we have had some gratifying results in standardizing our geographical names, much work remains to be done in this field. The current situation in our country is excellent. Under the leadership of the Party Central Committee headed by our wise leader Chairman Hua Kuo-feng, the Chinese people are united as one and in high spirits; holding high the great banner of Chairman Mao and carrying out his behests, we are working hard to realize the great strategic policy decision of "grasping the key link of class struggle in running the country well", which was formulated by Chairman Hua. A new historical period of development has begun in China's socialist revolution and socialist construction, and a new leap forward in China's national economy is taking shape. We are confident that

our work of standardization of geographical names, like our work in other fields, will make even more rapid progress. We are ready to learn with modesty from the advanced experience of the people of other countries. We are prepared to do our best, together with other delegations and through consultations on an equal footing, to fulfil the tasks confronting the conference and make it a success.

At the sixth session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, we brought up for discussion the question of adopting Chinese geographical names spelt with the Chinese phonetic alphabet as the international standard for the romanization of Chinese geographical names. We are glad to see that it received support from the majority of the experts. We reiterate that the Scheme for a Chinese Phonetic Alphabet is the official Roman alphabet scheme in China. Its use in spelling Chinese geographical names is China's established policy. It is already in wide use in China and will be applied more extensively along with its popularization. Therefore, we propose that this conference give full consideration to adopting Chinese geographical names spelt with the Chinese phonetic alphabet as the international standard for the romanization of Chinese geographical names.