

UNITED NATIONS  NATIONS UNIES

GROUP OF EXPERTS ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Working Group on the Names of Extraterrestrial
Topographic Features

Problems of Nomination
of Extraterrestrial Topographic
Features

The 2nd UN Conference on the standardization of geographical names, held in London from 10 to 31 May 1972, gave consideration, among other agenda items, to the problem of the "Names of extraterrestrial topographic features". The Conference discussed a number of relevant documents and adopted a corresponding resolution.

The following papers were discussed: "Draft report of the Working Group on the names of extraterrestrial features" (document E/CONF. 61/L.41), "On the naming of extraterrestrial features" (document E/CONF. 61/L. 55 prepared by the International Astronomical Union) and "Contemporary problems of Selenonymy" (document E/CONF. 61/L.107 submitted by the U.S.A.). The members of the Working Group Mr. A.M. Komkov (U.S.S.R.), Mr. M.F. Burrill (U.S.A.), Mr. H.A.G. Lewis (U.K.), the delegates Col. Sharma (India), Mr. R. Lapesa (Spain) and Prof. D. Menzel, Chairman of the IAU Working Group on Lunar nomenclature, per-

sonally invited to the Conference, took part in the discussion.

The exchange of views resulted in adoption of the following resolution.

Resolution 21

The Conference,

Having discussed the present situation with regard to the naming of extraterrestrial topographic features,

Recognizing that greatly increased lunar and planetary exploration, study and associated detailed large-scale mapping require a new perspective on the naming of extraterrestrial features and a wider base for international agreement,

Recommends that the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names study the question of drafting an international convention on the standardization of extraterrestrial nomenclature, in co-operation with other competent international bodies. (Document E/CONF. 61/3).

The fourth session of the Group of Experts held on June 1, 1972 adopted the decision on the prolongation of the powers of the Working Group on extraterrestrial features names in its actual membership, Mr. Sharma (India), Mr. S. Rado (Hungary) and Mr. R. Lapesa (Spain) having volunteered to join it. In addition, Prof. D. Menzel also expressed the wish to enter the Working Group (as the IAU representative).

In can be hoped that the relatively short time since the

London Conference have been used by the members of the Working Group for a detailed study of the above-mentioned documents of the Conference and for thinking over possible ways of the implementation of the resolution adopted. During this period some new materials have become available, among which Prof. Menzel's Memorandum of August 9, 1972 and his letter of December 26, 1972 are of most interest. The copies of these materials have been sent to all the members of our Working Group. These materials, as well as those of the London Conference convince us once more that the problem of nomination of lunar features is acquiring ever greater importance. The programme of the 1:250 000 mapping of the lunar surface, about which Prof. Menzel informs, will unavoidably require a significantly increased number of proper names or other kinds of designation of lunar features.

I believe we shall be unanimous in the opinion that it is impossible to resolve the problem by efforts only of the astronomers disregarding the experience of the experts on geographical names and the cartographers, i.e. without a closest international co-operation of specialists in different fields of knowledge.

To lay down possible ways and forms of such co-operation and to submit an appropriate report to the next session of the UN Group of Experts on geographical names, it is necessary to consider the following questions raised in document L.41 and to come, as far as possible, to an agreement upon them.

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In my thinking, our attention should primarily be focused on the following questions that are of certain interest for Prof. Menzel's Working Group as well.

1. Whether it is helpful to develop general principles of nomination of extraterrestrial topographic features to be followed when designating not only lunar topographic features but also those of Mars and, in future, other planets.

2. Whether the principles and systems of designation of topographic features on the near and far sides of the Moon should be the same. In this connexion another question arises: whether the existing system of alpha-numerical indices for satellite craters, adopted for the Moon's near side, should be extended to its far side, or whether it would be more helpful to drop this system at all (what Prof. Menzel suggests) and to find new proper names to replace the alpha-numerical designations of a great many of satellite craters.

3. If the application of new names is recognized desirable, - and thousands of them will be required, - what criteria could be accepted for establishing new names? I mean (a) the least size of a feature to be assigned a proper name; (b) types of proper names: memorial, descriptive, borrowed from the terrestrial topographic features, and the like; (c) what category of persons should be defined as a source of memorial names - scientists of certain branches of knowledge, public figures of definite rank,

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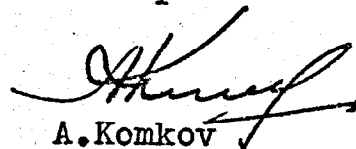
writers, painters and other cultural workers, etc.

4. What is our attitude towards the proposal to apply the co-ordinate designation system to still nameless features?

5. What recommendations can we give for designating micro-features of the lunar surface when it is surveyed immediately by astronauts, as in the case of Apollo 15 and 16 missions, or by automatic apparatus, as in the case of "Lunokhod". Prof. Menzel in his Memorandum of August 9, 1972 with good reason criticized the majority of designations on the map of the area covered by Apollo 15 mission. But when criticizing, we must apparently give recommendations what to do in such cases, taking into consideration, at least, the experience with nomination of geographical features in uninhabited areas, Antarctica, for example.

6. What should be the procedure of proposing, considering and approving new names at the national and international levels?

The above points are far from exhausting the problem. However, if we try to answer even these questions, we will, in my thinking, approach to the solution of the problem facing us.



A. Komkov

Co-ordinator of the Working Group
on the Names of extraterrestrial
topographic features