

DRAFT REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS GROUP OF EXPERTS
ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES AT ITS FIFTH SESSION

1. The United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names was invited by the Secretary-General in pursuance of Economic and Social Council resolution 1314 (XLIV) to convene at the United Nations in New York from 5 to 16 March 1973.

Attendance

2. The Session was attended by 32 experts from 20 countries representing 12 of the 14 geographical/linguistic divisions of the world.^{1/} The Acting Chief of the Cartography Section served as the Secretary for the Group.

Opening of the Session

3. The Session was opened by the Chairman of the Group of Experts.
4. The Group agreed to follow the same rules of procedure as in the previous sessions.
5. The Group adopted the following agenda:
 1. Opening of the session
 2. Progress reports by the Chairman and the Divisions
 3. Reports by the Working Groups
 4. Review of "Aims, functions and modus operandi"
 5. Proposal for United Nations gazetteer
 6. Names beyond a single sovereignty
 7. Training Courses
 8. Diacritical marks and exonyms
 9. Co-operation with other international organizations
 10. Plan of action before sixth session
 11. Report of the fifth session

^{1/} See Annex A.

Reports on Activities

6. The Chairman reported that he had presented a paper on the achievements of the London Conference during the Conference of the International Geographical Union in Montreal. This paper had also been sent to the Secretary General of the International Committee of Onomastic Sciences to be published in *Onoma*. The publication of the Report of the London Conference had had to be postponed because the report on the meeting of Committee V required editing to bring it into accord with United Nations reporting models. The Chairman, reporting for the USA-Canada Division, mentioned that Canada and the USA approached the categorization of under-sea features in different ways; whereas the USA based its categories on the size and shape of the feature, Canada proceeded from the genesis of the feature. The question was discussed during a meeting in Halifax, where the differences were clarified. The Chairman further drew attention to some new publications on names and name giving, published in his Division. The report by Mr. Gall on the activities of the Latin America Division was published as Working Paper No. 4. On request of Mr. Gall, Mr. Velasquez reported on progress made in Cuba. Mr. Nédélec, reporting for the Romance Languages Division stated that so far only France and Spain were active in the Division. He had already informed Italy of the Division's progress through the Military Geographical Institute in Firenze, but no answer had to date been received. It was decided that a combined effort by the United Nations Secretariat and the International Cartographic Association would be made in order to obtain active co-operation from Italy in the work of the Division. The report made by Mr. Radó on the East Central and South East Europe Division was submitted as Working Paper No. 11.

7. Mr. Breu, reporting on behalf of the Dutch-German Speaking Division, said that in due time he expected that the Democratic Republic of Germany would become a member of this Division. The report by Mr. Hovda on behalf of the Norden Division was distributed as Working Paper No. 3. Mr. Hovda regretted the fact that the announcement of the Oslo Conference had not been included in the final report of the London Conference. Mr. Lewis, reporting for the United Kingdom Division, said that work on Gaelic names was continuing. A report by Mr. Lambert of Australia on work being done in New Guinea would be available in the near future. The report by Mr. Komkov on work done in the U.S.S.R. Division was published as Working Paper No. 7. Mr. Komkov stated that in 1972 a small national anniversary atlas with gazetteer names had been published. Messrs. Kattan (Saudi Arabia) and Bulugna (Libya) of the Arabic Division reported that all Arabic countries except Morocco and Algeria adhered to the romanization system for Arabic adopted during the

Beirut Conference in 1971 and amended during the 1972 London Conference. Mr. Vadiie, reporting on behalf of the Asia Southwest Division, commented on Working Paper 14. Mr. Banlang, reporting for the Asia Southeast Division, said that documentation from the London Conference had been distributed to all of the countries in his Division, together with a request to comment on them, but that he had to date received no replies. Mr. Coker (Nigeria) of the Africa, South of the Sahara Division stated that by agreement he and Mr. Absaloms (Kenya) had divided this Division into two: Africa East and Africa West. ^{2/} Mr. Absaloms, speaking on behalf of the Africa East Division, asked for help in building up an organization that might form the backbone of this Division. The Chairman will contact the Ford Foundation for funds for this prupose.

Working Groups

8. The Working Groups on Extraterrestrial Topographic Features, on a Single Romanization System for each Non-Roman Writing System, on Definitions and on Maritime and Undersea Features reported on their work done since the London Conference and during the fifth session of the GEON (see annexes). Two new working groups were set up to deal with Training Courses and with International Gazetteers. These two working groups also reported to the GEON (see annexes). All the reports were accepted; tribute was paid to the report of Mr. Delaney, the convencer of the Working Group on Maritime and Undersea Features, for its excellent presentation and hope was expressed that it might serve as a model for other reports.

2/ A workable membership of the two divisions would appear to be:

Africa East

Botswana
Burundi
Ethiopia
Kenya
Lesotho
Madagascar
Malawi
Rwanda
Somalia
Swaziland
Tanzania
Uganda
Zaire
Zambia

Africa West

Cameroon
Central African Republic
Chad
Congo
Dahomey
Equatorial Guinea
Gabon
Gambia
Ghana
Guinea
Ivory Coast
Liberia
Mali
Niger
Nigeria
Senegal
Sierra Leone
Togo
Upper Volta

Reports of Working Groups

Bibliography of Gazetters 1945-1972

9. Mr. Meynen reported that since the London Conference the work had proceeded along the lines described in his report to that Conference. He mentioned specifically the help he had received from Mr. Abelson, Mr. Geelan and Mr. Lewis. Now that five volumes of references have been compiled, he thinks it is fine to bring the work to conclusion and to prepare for publication. The GEGN paid tribute to the tremendous work Mr. Meynen had accomplished and thanked him for his effort. ~~The hope was expressed that the bibliography might be published as a special U.N. publication.~~

Aims, Functions and Modus Operandi

10. It was felt that it was time to see if any modifications in the aims, functions and modus operandi of the GEGN were required. The list of major linguistic/geographical divisions was enlarged because of the division of the fourteenth Division into two new Divisions, Africa West and Africa East. It was not found necessary to constitute a separate Division for Greece because this country expressed the wish to be regarded as a member of the Roman language Division. It was agreed that the term Division would be applied to the name of each Division, the term group being removed. The names of the Divisions should be altered accordingly. It was underlined that the experts should realize that they represent their Divisions and not their countries. In this connexion methods were discussed to increase the work within the Divisions between meetings of the GEGN. It was the general opinion that regional conferences, especially cartographic conferences, might be of the greatest value in this respect. Also the prospective U.N. Information ^{circular} Bulletin could be of great help. Problems of correspondence and addressing were discussed and some suggestions for better means of communication were made.

11. The following amendments to the Aims, Functions and Modus Operandi adopted in 1970, were made on the proposal of the Central East and South East Europe Division:

9 will read: In order to carry out its work and to achieve the results required, on both the national and the international level, as specified in the resolutions adopted at U.N. conferences, the linguistic/geographical divisions as listed in paragraph 10 will continue to exist, etc.

Paragraph 14 will be enlarged with the following sentence:

The GEON may invite countries that have not yet participated in conferences or GEON sessions to take part, especially when their language or script is to be taken under consideration.

The first sentence of paragraph 21 will read:

Between meetings of the GEON, working groups of specialists may be formed under the chairmanship of one of the national experts referred to in paragraph 14, to study particular problems.

International Gazetteers

12. The proposal made during the Fourth Session of the GEON by the U.S. expert to convert ~~the~~ BCN Gazetteers under certain conditions into UN gazetteers met with approval, but also gave rise to many questions. A working group was formed to study and report on the matter (see annex).

Names Beyond a Single Sovereignty

13. Mr. Komkov pointed to resolution 24 of the London Conference and asked if the Chairman and the Secretary of the GEON had yet consulted officially or unofficially with the legal division of the United Nations. He stated that he himself had consulted lawyers, and that the result was to be found in Working Paper No. 8. A convention as mentioned in resolution 24 seemed more and more necessary as name giving continued on the Moon, in the Antarctic, and in underseas regions. The Chairman said that he had undertaken to see whether or not the resolution was acceptable to his Government, and had heard at the beginning of this year that it was. The Secretary pointed out that he must postpone consulting anyone in the United Nations until the resolution had been adopted by the Economic and Social Council, since the process may begin only after the ECOSOC has given permission to implement the resolution. He stated that he would begin this work as soon as the ECOSOC had given the green light.

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Mr. Breu drew the attention of the Group of Experts to resolution 25 of the London Conference, and to its implementation by Austrian-German and Swiss-~~German~~^{Austrian} committees which had standardized single names for mountains and water features on the borders of those countries.

Training Courses

15. ~~15.~~ Mr. Ormeling, commenting on Working Paper No. 24, said that this paper contained the document presented by the Dutch delegation to its government. The Dutch Government considered this a good opportunity to start a training programme and was willing to contribute financially to the plan proposed by the Dutch experts. However, the said government was of the opinion that this training course must not be an isolated affair; experience had taught that such isolated courses were of little use. The Dutch government stipulated as a condition for its help, that there must be a follow-up, that there must be a programme of a series of training courses, of which this one might constitute the beginning. Mr. Ormeling proposed the establishment of a Working Group with the specific task of studying the details of the programme of this first course and of examining the possibilities of a follow-up.

16. Many delegates paid tribute to this initiative. It was agreed that this was the appropriate time to do something in this field, and that all countries, not only the developing ones, could profit from this training. A serious lack of specialists in the field of geographical nomenclature was felt to exist. It was suggested that a more detailed programme ought to be worked out and that more specifications must be set forth as to the lecturers and the qualifications of the students. Two new items for the programme were proposed: a) automatic data processing and b) the names to be used on different kinds of maps. It was considered desirable that the lectures on field-collection ^{be} illustrated by means of films and sound-tracks. The minimum requirements to be met by the students must be made known at an early stage. Some additions to the list of countries to be invited were also proposed. It was felt necessary that a course in the French language also be organized.

17. ~~17.~~ As to an eventual follow-up it was made clear that courses were being planned in various regions, e.g. a training course for the Arabic area and one for Latin America. These courses might profit much from the experience that would be acquired during the Dutch pilot course. Mr. Delaney stated that he would strongly recommend that the next course be held in Canada; he could not commit his country but was very hopeful. The course in Canada might be a bilingual one; this country has considerable experience to offer, among other things on the treatment of names in unwritten languages.

18. A Working Group, consisting of Messrs. Blok, Hovda, Kattan, Lewis, Mayman, Ormeling and Vaille, was established to study the programme, to provide guidelines for nations sending students, and to consider prospective future developments. The Working Group

met and reported to the session (see Annex). After some discussion, during which it became clear that the first course would be necessarily an experimental one, the report was adopted.

Diacritical marks, exonyms

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26. Before the next session of the GEGN a paper on the financial consequences of the use of diacritical marks will be presented by Mr. Ormeling. Mr. Komkov, commenting on Working Paper No. 10, emphasized the need for these marks in the rendering of place names in most languages. It was the general feeling that the position of the Group was the same as that adopted in Geneva.

20. The problem of exonyms was considered on the basis of the Working Papers No. 9 and No. 21. It was acknowledged that the U.S.S.R., U.S.A., Hungary, Thailand and Norway had produced lists of exonyms as recommended in Resolution 28 of the London Conference. Other countries were also preparing such lists. Difficulties in the treatment of exonyms in various contexts were discussed, as was the relationship between exonyms and transliterated names. ^{converted from one writing system to another} Measures that could be taken to diminish the use of exonyms were proposed, such as inducing map publishers to increase the use of local names.

21. The following definitions were adopted:

An exonym is a written form of a geographical name used in a certain language for a geographical entity situated outside the area where the language has official status and differing in its form from the name used in the official language or languages of the area where the geographical entity is situated.

A conventional name is an exonym which is widely and currently used.

A traditional name is an exonym which is long established as well as being presently in use.

Co-operation with other international organizations

22. In pursuance of resolutions 31 and 33 of the London Conference, the Group of Experts considered the subject of co-operation with those international organizations, both scientific and inter-governmental which deal with place-names and publish reference works. It was felt that this co-operation was essential to the application of name standardization. In particular the Universal Postal Union, the International Telecommunication Union, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the International Union of Tourist Organizations ^{+ the ICA} and the International Geographical Union, who all in one way or another use and disseminate names, were thought to be

of the ~~almost~~ importance.

It was agreed that a letter would be sent to each of these organizations to inform them of the task the United Nations referred to GEGN, to inform them of GEGN plans and to ask for their co-operation.

23. It was acknowledged that contacts with scientific organizations such as the International Astronomical Union, the International Committee of Onomastic Sciences and the ~~International Cartographic Union~~ might be improved.

It was the general feeling that ultimate responsibility for the methods employed in name giving ought to lay with United Nations bodies because of their international standing. All organizations that are occupied in name giving should be aware of this.

Plan of action
before the Sixth Session

24. 18. The Working Groups are to prepare specific papers (see Annex) for the next session either by correspondence or by separate Working Group meetings when these are possible.

Divisional meetings ^{were} envisaged in various areas; the work within the divisions will be stimulated by the experts.

As to the preparation of the next ^{session} meeting itself, it was deemed desirable that more preparatory work be done by intensive correspondence so that during the session time might be employed more economically.

The ^{sixth} next session was tentatively scheduled in March 1975, while ^{the 7th} a session at the end of May or the beginning of June 1976 might be devoted principally to the preparation of the third conference.

25. 19. It was agreed that the setting up of a complete list of country names in the five official languages of the United Nations and in the official languages of the particular countries belonged to the competence of the GEGN. A Working Group was established to prepare such a list to be presented to the next session of the GEGN. The convenor of the Working Group is Mr. Nédálec; other members are Messrs. Breu, Coker, Lewis, Page, Radó and Vadiis. The Working Group will base its work on existing documentation such as the United Nations list of member-countries, the list published by Hungary, and the ^{United Nations} Statistical Yearbook; it will co-operate with the Documentation and Terminology Section of the United Nations, whose Chief, Mr. Gómez de Silva, was present at the discussion of this subject.