

UNITED NATIONS

Fifth Session of the Group of Experts
on Geographical Names
5-16 March 1973

ON THE MOST ACCEPTABLE FORM AND
CONTENTS OF THE GAZETTEERS PUBLISHED
UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE UNITED
NATIONS

Submitted by A.M.Komkov, U.S.S.R.

On the most acceptable form and contents
of the gazetteers published under the
auspices of the United Nations

1. At the 4th session of the UN Group of Experts, held in London on June 1, 1972, Dr. M.F. Burrill, the delegate from the U.S.A., Chairman of our Group on behalf of his Government made a motion: to hand over to the UN the series of gazetteers, prepared by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names and containing standard ^{x)} geographical names of a great many of the world's countries, in order that these gazetteers would be republished under the auspices of the UN and obtain, by this way, the status of official international reference-books. This motion was accepted by the participants with great interest and the question has now been included in the agenda of the present fifth session.

2. It is widely known that the U.S. is greatly experienced in producing gazetteers for foreign countries. As Mr. Burrill told the last session, the U.S. gazetteers covered all the world's countries, except the territory of her own, and they include in the whole over 4 million names. It would be unreasonable to refuse of such a generous proposal, of the rich experience of our American colleagues. But

x) Standard names approved by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names for official use by all the governmental services of the U.S.A.

at the same time it should be worth considering all the aspects: legal, scientific and technical, and economical.

3. The very idea of producing gazetteers, which would carry on their title page the top words "United Nations" and further "recommended for international use", is excellent. The publication of such gazetteers would be a deserved accomplishment of the first step in the standardization of geographical names. Next stages would only be a systematic renewal and supplementation of the gazetteers in use. But the high title of the United Nations binds every such a document to be indeed of the international significance and agree with national interests of any country. Therefore, the first term for publishing under the auspices of the UN any gazetteers on the basis of either the US gazetteers or any other country would be the consent of the country which a gazetteer is planned for.

4. Further we consider that it would be important to lay as the basis of the UN gazetteers a romanization system, in the case of a non-Roman writing country, that will be adopted for the international use. Besides a romanized form of a name it is extremely important to retain a national form written in characters of the language in question. The further important term consists in the proportionateness of gazetteers for different countries. It would not be reasonable to issue a bulky gazetteers (covering a great number of small features) for some country of a small territory

and at the same time to publish a thin gazetteer for a large country. Particular questions arise in connexion with gazetteers for the territories and sea regions beyond a single sovereignty.

5. The U.S. gazetteers which are planned to be the basis of the UN gazetteers are an outstanding phenomenon in the world's practice of national standardization of geographical names. Their completeness and quality from the standpoint of the national interests of the U.S.A. is without any doubt. However, we consider that they do not satisfy the above mentioned terms in all the senses. To be a possible basis for the UN gazetteers they can be divided into three main groups.

5a. The first group should include gazetteers of the countries with the Roman writing. As it is known they retain the original form of a name in a Roman writing accepted in the language of a given country, e.g. France, Italy, Latin American countries, etc. The utilization of the U.S. gazetteers covering the countries in question provided, of course, they agree to it and the volumes of the gazetteers are proportioned to these countries could not raise an objection and could be realized in the near future.

5b. It is proposed to include in the second group the gazetteers covering the territories and sea regions beyond a single sovereignty - that is, the Antarctic and

undersea features of the open sea. This problem is more complicated. As far as such gazetteers include names given by different countries at different times it is necessary to agree upon particular names and gazetteers as a whole between all the countries concerned. So the problem of international standardization of geographical names of the features that do not belong and cannot belong to any single state according to the existing international treaties and agreements will be solved. The procedure of agreement upon such gazetteers will not be so simple and probably take a lot of time but the ground for such a work exists and it can and should be carried out.

5c. The third group of gazetteers covers countries applying various non-Roman scripts / Cyrillic, hieroglyphic, Arabic, Amharic, Tai, Devanagari, etc./ . The U.S. gazetteers give in the cases of these scripts only one romanized form according to the BGN standard.

This standard, as it is known, is far from being accepted by all the countries. In our understanding the U.N. gazetteers should first of all give the names in a romanization system officially accepted by the country concerned. Besides, it is most desirable that the romanized name form be accompanied with the form in national script which is extremely important in many cases of practical utilization of the gazetteers.

Therefore the gazetteers of the third group in

/...

their present form and contents can hardly serve as a prototype for the UN gazetteers. Much work will be required to restore and reproduce the national forms of names. A possible sample of such a gazetteer by form and contents is offered to the members of the UN Group of Experts on geographical names. The U.S. gazetteer No.53 "Egypt" served as a basis for this pattern which differs from the former. The BGN romanization in the first column is replaced by the 1972 Arab Countries Romanization, a column for national script is added. The rest of information is borrowed from the gazetteer. Probably other proposals can be made in this case but what is without doubt that the preparation of gazetteers of this group will require considerable and long work in which the countries concerned will have to take a direct part.

In the conclusion we note once again that the proposal of preparation of gazetteers under the auspices of the United Nations deserves the most serious attention and backing while taking into account the remarks and wishes stated above.

ABĀ AL-WAQF	ابا الوقف	POPL	28 35 N	30 46 E	52109
'ABBĀD, BI'R	بشر عباد	WELL	25 02 N	33 04 E	52102
'ABBĀD, WĀDĪ	وادي عباد	WADI	24 59 N	32 54 E	52100
'ABD AL-MALIK, WĀDĪ	وادي عبد الملك	WADI	23 55 N	25 17 E	52115
'ABD AN-NABĪ, BI'R	بشر عبد النبي	WELL	29 59 N	26 58 E	52114
ABIS, TUR'AT	ترعة ابيس	CNAL	31 07 N	30 02 E	52103
ABNŪB	ابنوب	POPL	27 16 N	31 09 E	52118
ABNŪD	ابنود	POPL	26 03 N	32 47 E	52125
ABRAQ, BI'R	بشر ابرق	WELL	23 25 N	34 48 E	52102
ABŪ 'AWAYJĪLAH, BI'R	بشر ابو عويجيلة	WELL	29 20 N	31 29 E	52102
ABŪ 'AWAYD, RA'S	رأس ابو عويد	CAPE	25 50 N	34 24 E	52102
ABŪ 'AZĪZ	ابو عزيز	POPL	28 26 N	30 50 E	52109
ABŪ BURŪSH, JABAL	جبل ابو بروش	MT	22 31 N	33 59 E	52102
ABŪ DHI'ĀB, JABAL	جبل ابو ذئاب	MT	25 12 N	34 14 E	52102
ABŪ GHĀLIB, MAHĀTTAT	محطة ابو غالب	RSTA	30 16 N	30 54 E	52107
ABŪ MUHARRIK, GHURD	غرد ابو محسرك	DUNE	26 25 N	30 12 E	52100
ABŪ RUTHAH, JABAL	جبل ابو روثه	MT	29 30 N	34 44 E	52126
ABŪ SUNDŪQ, BI'R	بشر ابو صندوق	WELL	29 25 N	32 31 E	52102
ABŪ TAIH, WĀDĪ	وادي ابو طلع	WADI	30 21 N	32 09 E	52102