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FIFTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE
ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
Montreal, 18-31 August 1987
Item 15 of the agenda

# Draft report of the Conference

## Chapter II: Summary of the work of the Conference:

## Work of Committee III

COMMITTEE III REPORT

International Programmes

Features beyond a single sovereignty (item 10)

1. The pertinent document presented by the United States of America (E/CONF.79/L.17) contained two agreements regarding principles and policies for the treatment of transboundary geographical names, with Canada, on the one hand, and with Mexico on the other.

On a related matter, Canada submitted document E/CONF.79/INF/49 which dealt with transboundary names standardization from a different vantage point. Rather than viewing geographical naming as a technical, scientific and practical exercise, it was pointed out that toponymy as a field of study should also encompass the historical and cultural reality inherent in names. The study of transboundary names was seen as a case in point for this type of inquiry.

The Chairman asked whether other countries could report on collaborative efforts with neighbouring states regarding the issue of name differences. Norway, France, Israel, Morocco, Kenya, and Spain shared some of their experiences in this field. Particular attention was drawn to a future physical link between Spain and Morocco. Morocco stated that detailed documents at 1:10,000 scale were developed of the sea floor of the Strait of Gibraltar where each feature needed to be named. The Chairman stressed the desirability of having, wherever possible, one approved name for an international feature, to be used by all countries concerned. He stated that the Conference provides a proper forum for co-operation in this area and called on individual countries to make reports, at the Sixth United Nations Conference and at the next session of the Group of Experts, on projects of international feature naming in which neighbouring states participate.

2. With regard to maritime and undersea features, the Chairman pointed out that resolution 12 of the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names had been carried out. The UNGEGN Liaison Officer to the International Hydrographic Bureau (IHB) gave a comprehensive report on recent activities (see E/CONF.79/L.18), such as his participation in a meeting at IHB headquarters in Monaco in 1985 where names for the sixth edition of the General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans (GEBCO) were approved and his recommendation that IHB combine two publications dealing with geographic names into a single volume. In addition to the GEBCO map series, the IHB publishes these two documents: "Standardization of Undersea Feature Names" and the "List of Geographical Names of Undersea Features Shown on the GEBCO 5th Edition and on the small Scale IHO International Chart Series". It was announced that a revised issue of IHO Special Publication 23, "Limits of Oceans and Seas" is now in final editing. This publication will contain names and locations of major and subsidiary water bodies. It was compiled to provide aid to navigation. The entire current names file of the

United States Board on Geographic Names Advisory Committee on Undersea Features (ACUF) has been established in an automated data base. Furthermore, a third edition of the BGN Undersea Features gazetteer is planned. In summary, he remarked that if the IHB would include the standardization of maritime feature names in its programme, a satisfactory conclusion to the problem of maritime features could be reached.

A brief report prepared by the IHO (see E/CONF.79/L.77) contained a valuable decision which postulates that member States adhere to the guidelines in new official naming of undersea features.

In document E/CONF.79/L.64, Canada noted that the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (CPCGN) approved the outer limits of the Gulf of St. Lawrence in 1984. Canada stated further that its Advisory Committee on Names for Undersea and Maritimes Features (ACNUMF) maintained relationships with both the Advisory Committee on Undersea Features of the United States Board on Geographic Names and the Greenland Language Commission. It was also announced that the second edition of the "Gazetteer of Undersea Feature Names" was published in 1987. It is anticipated that in subsequent editions, information on the origin and usage of each name and descriptive notes on size and location of each feature will be included. ACNUMF will also implement the recommendations of the Group of Experts to the greatest extent possible. Greece commented on document E/CONF.79/INF/58, presented by Turkey, that the features in the list are incompatible with the Group of Experts guidelines, i.e., some of the features are in an area outside Turkish sovereignty. Turkey responded by stating that these are the standardized names for undersea and maritime features used in Turkey. The Chairman observed that the issue was of a political nature and thus outside the scope of the Conference. He then asked what steps in regard to naming maritime and undersea features should be undertaken between now and the next Conference. The USA suggested that one-on-one collaboration and reference to IHO publications would be useful and that conflicts sould be adjudicated; as for IHO, the United States and Norway agreed that if another body is created or the Working Group reconvened, then the current state of affairs and past agreements should be reviewed. The U.K. indicated that it would be best for the Group of Experts to discuss whether or not the Working Group should be re-established.

3. There were no documents on the subject of extraterrestrial features. The USA commented that naming of these features is done by the International Astronomical Union (IAU) and that a member of the Group of Experts had been appointed to that body; furthermore, it appeared that this issue required minimal attention. Greece concurred. The Committee felt, however, that it would be important to obtain exact information on what is being done in this field. The United States suggested that interested countries could write to the IAU directly or request the Group of Experts liaison member to transmit comments. The Chairman concluded that for the next Conference, contact should be made with the appropriate agencies in order to urge them to attend the Conferences or urge the IAU to submit written reports on their activities regarding standardization.

## International Programmes

### Toponymic education and practice and international co-operation (item 12)

1. The discussion of this topic was based on the following four resolutions from past Conferences:

(a) Resolution 18 (Second United Nations Conference)
(b) Resolution 15 (Third United Nations Conference)
(c) Resolution 5 (Fourth United Nations Conference)
(d) Resolution 6 (Fourth United Nations Conference)

In resolution 18, it was suggested that a pilot training course on the collection and treatment of names be given; in resolution 6, the first pilot course in toponymy, held in Cisarua, Indonesia (1982) was duly acknowledged. In turn, a follow-up training course was held in Rabat, Morocco (1985). Resolution 15 stressed that technical assistance be given by countries with experience to those countries requesting such assistance. Canada gave as an example the Douala (Cameroun) project, sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency, dealing with the standardization of odonyms of a metropolitan area. Resolution 5 stipulates that each country attempt to provide training at the academic level. At the twelfth session of the Group of Experts two types of courses were proposed, an elementary course and a more advanced one (possibly including data processing). A course syllabus should be provided for each.

The United Kingdom suggested that documents E/CONF.79/CRP.3, a manual on national standardization, and "Technical Terminology Employed in the Standardization of Geographical Names" (Glossary No. 330) be considered as instructional tools.

The Chairman reported that he had contacted a number of countries to assess the situation in the teaching of toponymy and that a few dozen replies had been received. He stated that it was important to identify courses with a practical orientation. It is planned to distribute this information at the next session of the Group of Experts. He suggested that interested countries submit their training needs either to the United Nations Secretariat or to him directly.

The Chairman requested that the Working Group on Courses in Toponymy identify basic documents for future courses. He proposed a document "kit" containing a modular syllabus (to which other elements could be added as needed), a basic bibliography on different regions where the prospective course will be held (it may have to be indexed), Glossary No. 330 and the national standardization manual (vide supra), a list of definitions of generics, basic information on data bases, i.e., a description of extant systems, and a sample of gazetteer formats reflecting the criteria advanced by the United Nations. The next session of the Group of Experts was mentioned as a target date for completion of this task.

2. The Committee continued its discussion with useful comments made by several delegates. Morocco thanked the United Nations for the assistance given for the training course held in Rabat and expressed the view that it is necessary to create toponymic commissions in the countries concerned. Norway stated that it would like to establish training courses throughout the country, but that a lack of funds and a manpower shortage precluded this goal from being achieved (see E/CONF.79/L.55). The USA described the objectives of its Board on Geographic Names training programme in office procedures and stated that the course continues to be open to interested countries (see E/CONF.79/L.24). Israel presented a syllabus of a course in toponymy offered at Hebrew University (see E/CONF.79/L.66). Finland referred to its course in toponymy which is mandatory for teachers of Finnish (see E/CONF.79/L.67). Canada stated that a new course of applied toponymy has been introduced in the Geography Department at Laval University in Québec (see E/CONF.79/L.52). Malaysia announced that at the last meeting of the Asia South-East and Pacific South-West Division, it was decided to hold a training course in a member country. Cuba inquired whether a member country of the Latin America Division could host a course with United Nations sponsorship. In responding, the Chairman referred to resolution 6 of the Fourth United Nations Conference.

Concerning its work with the Pan American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH), the USA gave a brief report on progress made by PAIGH's Working Group on Gazetteers and Geographical Names. This working group had reached a decision in the early 1980s to produce national gazetteers. Also, a PAIGH-funded training course will be held in Panama in 1987.

Kenya reiterated its intention, made at the twelfth session of the Group of Experts, to hold a training course soon and Canada informed the Committee that a training session for French-speaking trainees has been proposed by Canada to be held by the Commission de toponymie du Québec in Québec in 1988 (see E/CONF.79/L.53).

3. The Committee also asked the United Nations Secretariat to disseminate information on standardization efforts made in various countries and on new developments in this field. It was suggested that a possible vehicle could be a brief periodic bulletin (bi-annual).

As a remedy to cope with the financial difficulties associated with the exchange of personnel, the Chairman asked if countries could provide technical personnel or other kinds of support to the United Nations Secretariat.

## Agenda Item II (a): Romanization

The Chairman opened the discussion by recalling resolution 9 of the First United Nations Conference, which called for the achievement of a single romanization system for each non-roman alphabet or script, and resolution 16 of the Fourth Conference, which noted that suitable consultations within the Group of Experts were necessary before arriving at a single system agreeable to all countries. He also reminded the Conference of resolution 15 of the Fourth Conference, which requested that any country proposing a romanization

system for its own non-Roman alphabet or script should already have implemented the system adequately, particularly in cartographic publications. This resolution was based on the principle that international standardization should be linked to national standardization.

The Chairman considered that these three resolutions from previous Conferences formed a background to the current discussion. Particular note was taken of resolution 16 of the Fourth Conference; the question should not be whether to choose a particular donor system or receiver system, but rather that efforts should be made to reconcile the two approaches. Each side has its own interests which need to be taken into account.

The Chairman then handed over direction of the ensuing discussion to the Vice-Chairman, (Austria), in his capacity as ad hoc convenor of the Working Group on a Single Romanization System for each non-Roman Writing System within the UNGEGN.

The Vice-Chairman noted that there were several documents of a general nature to be considered before discussion could move on to individual cases. The United States of America introduced its paper E/CONF.79/L.23. This document considered the role to be played by donors and receivers and stressed the need for countries concerned to resolve differences through mutual co-operation and agreement at an early stage. Otherwise receiver countries, particularly those producing many maps and charts, would be faced with serious practical difficulties. The degree of establishment and range of application of existing effective systems need to be considered; often these systems have provided a large body of reference material and a high degree of continuity. The costs of conversion are real, and should not be taken lightly. To disallow an existing system in favour of a new donor system could cause confusion and practical disruption, thereby retarding rather than advancing the goal of ultimate standardization. Donor systems might also be susceptible to future change. Certainly, any system put forward should be based on solid technical linguistic principles.

The Vice-Chairman considered the difficulty to be the existence of one source non-roman alphabet or script on the one hand, but many target roman alphabets on the other. The entire Roman-script community was involved, and its many alphabets differed widely for example, in the use of diacritical marks and special letters. Generally speaking, he felt it had proved easier for a unified system to originate from a single central source, namely the donor. The various receivers often had long-established systems suited to the needs of their own individual alphabets, and so it was frequently difficult for them to agree on a single system. Further, the formulation of a donor system could be considered as a matter of national standardization, and both the Group of Experts and the United Nations Conferences has long considered that national standardization should form the basis for international standardization.

Discussion moved on to document E/CONF.79/L.10, submitted by the Dutch and German-speaking Division of the UNGEGN. This paper, introduced by the Chairman of the Division, attempted to define the concept of scientific

principles, as related to romanization. In drawing up a romanization system, consideration should be given to such factors as simplicity of graphemic representation, pronounceability, whether transliteration or transcription is preferred, whether or not a non-roman script, such as Cyrillic, should be treated uniformly and the nature of the alphabet used for romanization. The Chairman of the Division recognized that certain countries face practical difficulties if a change in system is involved, but these should be secondary considerations; the primary aim is to seek systems based on "scientific principles".

The United Kingdom considered it unwise to use part of a dictionary definition for the particular purpose of defining "scientific" in this highly-specialized instance. Rather, practical linguistic principles should be employed to determine systems which would be useful in practice for the largest possible number or users, non-specialists as well as specialists. In a recent case involving economic aid for famine relief, the United Kingdom had had experience of aid workers being unable to use the relevant maps because the names and been given in an unusual romanization system which was difficult to interpret. In reply, the Chairman of the Division regarded the dictionary definition mentioned as being appropriate for general use, and felt an adequate definition of "scientific principles" had been given. His opinion concerning the fifth and sixth paragraphs of this document was shared by the U.S.A.

The U.K. then introduced document E/CONF.79/INF/17. Although the Groups of Experts and the Conferences had accomplished a great deal since 1967, full implementation of the resolutions passed had by no means been achieved. For example, the Arab world still had much to do before the romanization system for Arabic was fully implemented. Despite the existence of a resolution for a romanization system for Persian, implementation could not be complete because of lack of detailed information concerning the location of places whose names had been altered. With regard to China, fuller implementation of Pinyin depended upon the increased availability of such source materials as had been mentioned in the national report from that country. Consideration should therefore be given to the full implementation of what had been agreed in the past, before further romanization systems were added which would only increase the burden involved.

The U.S.A. considered that attention should be given to the exact meaning of the term "international use" as used, for example, in resolution 15 of the Fourth Conference. An accurate definition depended on such factors as type and scale of the product, and the nature of the users for whom it was intended. The Vice-Chairman felt that the term covered products intended for the international public, such as international atlases, international timetables, the International Map of the World at 1:1,000,000 scale, and the international 1:2,500,000 map series edited by the CMEA countries.

Discussion then turned to individual scripts and alphabets as follows:

(i) Greek

Greece introduced document E/CONF.79/INF/38 and expressed its pleasure at being in a position, together with Cyprus, to submit the ELOT 743 romanization system for approval as the international system for the romanization of Greek geographical names. It was a system which had been developed over a period of many years, and extensive discussions during that period within the UNGEGN had helped to influence its final form. Greece considered the system to be scientifically sound and suited to cartography, and furthermore it had already been implemented by the donor countries in maps of Greece and in maps and gazetteers of Cyprus. The system had been officially sanctioned by the Governments of Greece and Cyprus, though full implementation would take a considerable time.

Cyprus endorsed the opinion expressed by Greece, and both Italy and Cuba also supported the system. In response to a question from the U.K. Greece explained that the transcription option should be used for cartographic purposes, whereas the option of transliteration was intended for users, such as librarians, who may need the facility of reversibility which this option afforded. The U.K. affirmed the importance of maintaining the tonic stress on the original Greek-script name, leaving users the choice as to whether or not to include it in the romanized form. Italy agreed with this view and the Chairman reminded the Conference of resolution 10 of the First Conference dealing with the retention of diacritical marks. Greece reported that, in all official publications, the stress mark would be included in the romanized form.

In response to a question from Cuba, Greece reported that ELOT 743 would not be obligatory for classicists who preferred, in their own contexts, to continue using traditional names.

The U.K. and the U.S.A. both considered this to be an excellent example of a system achieved by co-operation between donors and receivers, of a lengthy period of time. Such co-operation was essential if a spirit of consensus and harmony is to be felt. The U.K. remarked on the changes currently taking place within the Greek language itself, from katharévousa to dhimotikí, and noted that Greece had promised the maximum assistance to receivers to provide ELOT 743 in terms of dhimotikí.

(ii) Serbocroatian and Macedonian

Yugoslavia reported that there was no change. Resolution 11 of the Third Conference remained valid.

(iii) Bulgarian

In the absence of representation from Bulgaria, the Vice-Chairman expressed his feeling that implementation of resolution 10 of the Third Conference was well under way in that country.

(iv) Russian

Introducing document E/CONF.79/INF/37, the USSR reported that since 1983 the GOST system had been used for romanization of Cyrillic script names within the USSR. It was obligatory in that country for scientific and cartographic purposes and had been formulated in accordance with scientific principles. A draft system prepared in 1982 had been widely discussed at the Fourth Conference, and subsequent modifications to introduce diagraphs resulted from discussions with other countries. The final form presented to this Conference had already been discussed at the eleventh and twelfth sessions of the UNGEGN. Implementation of the system could be seen in a 1:8,000,000 scale map of the USSR, in railway timetables and on road signs, and it would also be used in the third edition of the "Atlas Mira" which was in preparation.

In response to questions from the U.S.A. and the U.K., the Vice-Chairman noted that the General CMEA Standard existed side-by-side with the GOST 1983 system, but that only the latter was intended for cartographic purposes. Both the U.K. and the U.S.A. considered the existence of parallel systems to be a potential cause of confusion, since textual and cartographic references to a given single geographical name could be quite different. A great deal of confusion also remained over the variants of the system, and further clarification was essential. The U.K. considered the GOST system to be inappropriate for English-speaking users, who together spoke the most widely-used language in the world, and any attempt at its application may even encourage the creation of new conventional names. Any Conference recommendation should be practical, at least in terms of the working languages of the United Nations.

France reported that it had used the USSR Academy of Sciences system for many years, but had used the GOST system since its adoption by the USSR. Italy considered the GOST system to be the best submitted so far, but understood that certain receiver countries would face vast expense and difficulties in converting from existing systems. Italy, therefore, suggested that there should be an optional variant transliteration of certain letters to allow for English language conventions.

Cuba considered that the GOST 1983 system should be adopted because it did not favour any one particular receiver language and because it had been implemented within the USSR. The German Democratic Republic noted that the system had also been adopted by the countries of the CMEA. It was a sound system which was appropriate for international use. Czechoslovakia noted that the East, Central and South-East Europe Division of the UNGEGN had adopted the system. It was noted that Finland already used the system, and Sweden reported that it would also use it if it were approved at this Conference. The Vice-Chairman noted that the GOST 1983 system was almost identical with the International Standardization Organization System, resolution 9 of 1968.

(v) Other non-roman alphabets of the USSR

No new developments were reported.

(vi) Mongolian

No new developments were reported.

(vii) Arabic

The Vice-Chairman reminded the Conference of the importance of resolution 11 of the First Conference, dealing with diacritical marks in Arabic, and providing information about its implementation.

Morocco recognized that resolution 8 of the Second Conference had approved the Modified Beirut System, but stated that there remained some disquiet over the romanization of one letter (ﻫ). Discussions among Arab nations were well advanced, and a satisfactory outcome was anticipated in the near future. Saudi Arabia hoped that any change would be very minor, because it had already implemented the current system widely over a period of 15 years. Ninety-five per cent of field-collected names, as well as the resultant maps, used this system. Italy noted the difficulties of achieving standardization in the romanization of Arabic; different countries had different traditions and, moreover, full standardization depended on the presence of vowel points in the original Arabic.

(viii) Persian and Dari

No new developments were reported.

(ix) Urdu

Pakistan introduced document E/CONF.79/INF/35 and reported that the Hunterian system, in use for many decades, remained operative. It was a straightforward system, using only one diacritical mark (a long bar to indicate vowel length), and it adequately met the national requirements of Pakistan.

(x) Pashto

No new developments were reported.

(xi) Hebrew

Israel reported that resolution 13 of the Third Conference remained valid. Perhaps the system could theoretically be improved, but it was already widely used officially and had the advantage of being fully vowelled. On a general level, Israel considered that countries which were visited by many tourists with different language backgrounds should proceed with caution when preparing single romanization systems.

(xii) Amharic

Ethiopia introduced document E/CONF.79/INF/32, reporting that resolution 7 of the Second Conference currently remained valid, but that the

system required alteration in the future in order to render it suitable for all receiver languages. Field collection of names was undertaken in Amharic, the national language of Ethiopia, but romanization was necessary to assist foreign map users.

(xiii) Languages of the Indian Division

In the absence of representation by India the Vice-Chairman commented that resolution 12 of the Third Conference had not been implemented in that country. He drew attention to a document (E/CONF.79/INF/65) submitted by India which reported that the Hunterian system was still in use on large-scale mapping and remained the only romanization system employed. Production of Hindi editions of large-scale maps was still in an experimental stage. Pakistan noted that the romanization information contained in the document submitted by India showed a few minor differences compared to the situation in Pakistan, though both countries used the Hunterian system.

(xiv) Burmese

No new developments were reported.

(xv) Thai

Thailand introduced documents E/CONF.79/L.31 and E/CONF.79/INF/39. Resolution 14 of the First Conference currently remained valid, but consideration was being given in Thailand to certain modifications, and the opinions of different countries on this topic would be welcome. Thailand explained the background to the General and Precise Systems of the Royal Institute and the need to improve these to arrive at a system based on sounder linguistic principles. The task was not yet finally concluded, but after further consultation, a revised system would be presented to the International Standardization Organization and to the Sixth United Nations Conference.

In response to questions from Italy and Spain, Thailand reported that tone marks were not used in cartography, and that use of diacritical marks was optional.

The U.K. congratulated Thailand on the detailed study it was undertaking, and considered Thailand's approach to this question to be a classic example of proper co-operation between donor and receivers.

(xvi) Lao

No new developments were reported.

(xvii) Khmer

No new developments were reported.

(xviii) Chinese

China reported that resolution 8 of the Third Conference remained valid. Pinyin was the romanization system in use in China and it was being implemented more and more widely.

(xix) Japanese

Japan introduced document E/CONF.79/INF/8, reporting no change in the situation since the Fourth Conference. Two systems, Kunrei-siki and Modified Hepburn, remained in parallel use, the former on international maps and charts, the latter used by a substantial number of receiver countries. The Geographical Survey Institute of Japan had adopted Kunrei-siki, but at present there is no prospect of a Conference resolution.

(xx) Korean

The Republic of Korea introduced document E/CONF.79/INF/68. The Ministry of Education system, first promulgated in 1959, had been modified in 1984 after 12 years of study. It was being used in maps and gazetteers but, equally, there existed the McCune-Reischauer system established in the 1930s. The same geographical name could appear quite different in spelling depending upon the system used and this created confusion. The Republic of Korea considered that it was now an appropriate time to recommend the 1984 Ministry of Education system. The Vice-Chairman noted that it would be useful to have information from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, since the same language was in use in both countries.

## Agenda Item 11 (b): Conversion into non-roman writing systems

Introducing document E/CONF.79/INF/56, Israel reported that geographical names were being converted from many scripts into Hebrew, using a computerized toponymic transliteration/transcription/translation system. This was achieved via roman script using the index of some 225,000 names contained in the "Times Atlas". About 2,000 generic terms had been fed into the computers; these were automatically translated into Hebrew on recognition.

The Vice-Chairman recommended, as a highly authoritative work in the field, "The Conversion of Scripts" by Hans Wellisch, which deals with romanization and the conversion from roman script to other scripts. Also, the USSR published a series of manuals dealing with conversion into Russian cyrillic.

## Agenda Item 11 (c): Writing of names in unwritten languages

The Chairman noted the existence of many Amerindian languages in Canada, and the achievements accomplished in adopting writing systems for almost all of them. He also noted that geographical names of written, but not

standardized languages, had to be considered as a relevant problem. A recent native languages conference in Canada had addressed the question of standardization in these systems.

Morocco reported that there were many names of Berber origin in that country. Berber was an ancient language which did not exist in a written form. Arabic script was therefore used to record these names, though this inevitably meant that some Berber names could not be perfectly represented.

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