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Fifth United Nations Conference  
on the Standardization of  
Geographical Names  
Montreal, 18-31 August 1987  
Item 1 of the provisional agenda\*

OPENING OF THE CONFERENCE

Statement made by Max C. de Henseler,  
Conference Executive Secretary

Paper submitted by the Secretariat

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\* E/CONF.79/1.

STATEMENT MADE BY MAX C. DE HENSELER,\*  
CONFERENCE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

Dr. Beredjick, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is indeed a great pleasure to welcome you to this Fifth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, and it is a great honour for me to serve you as Executive Secretary of this Conference.

Dr. Beredjick, in his opening address, recalled that it was 20 years ago that the first United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names took place. Today four conferences and 13 sessions of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names later, it is with great pride that one can look at your accomplishments, and I would like to review, very briefly of course, the highlights which took place since the Fourth Conference. It seems that in the past five years your efforts in the Standardization of Geographical Names have been extremely successful and that the Standardization of Geographical Names has attracted more and more attention in many countries, at the national and at the international levels and that this fact has been reflected most positively in every activity at the United Nations dealing with cartography in general and, of course, in its activities specifically directed to the Standardization of Geographical Names.

The achievements which took place at the national level are well documented in the various country reports which will be discussed in detail during this Conference. I would like here to thank all the experts from the various countries who have co-operated very closely with the United Nations Secretariat in the diffusion of our common objectives through United Nations sponsored activities.

I can only emphasize once more the point that Dr. Beredjick has stressed already. It is the outstanding contribution made by all the countries who have sent experts to the Eleventh and Twelfth Sessions of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names. Our Conferences at five-year intervals could not be as effective and commanding such a high level of participation if it would not be for the hard work performed by the Group of Experts. As most of you are fully aware of the work performed by the Group of Experts during the past five years, I will not go into details as the reports of both sessions have been distributed and will be discussed during this Conference. All the activities undertaken by the United Nations in the field of standardization of geographical names are in direct implementation of resolutions adopted at previous Conferences and have been successfully carried out because of the guidance provided to the Secretariat by the Group of Experts.

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Among the most concrete achievements made since the last Conference, mention should be made of several technical publications; in particular the publication by the United Nations Department of Conference Services, of the Glossary No. 330, which has already undergone two revisions. This six-language Glossary entitled "Technical Terminology Employed in the Standardization of Geographical Names" contains 175 definitions in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. Most of the English, French and Spanish terms have already been endorsed by the Group of Experts and by the previous Conference. The Secretariat is deeply indebted to Mr. Wang Jitong, Mr. Komkov and Mr. Tazi for their great contribution in providing the Secretariat with the Chinese, Russian and Arabic versions respectively. This Glossary will be kept under constant review and revised and augmented versions will be issued as required by the United Nations.

It is with the greatest pleasure also that I report the publication of the special issues of the Bulletin "World Cartography", volume XVIII, entirely devoted to the subject of standardization of geographical names. And I would like to thank all its contributors but in particular the members of the editorial board, the Chairman of the Group of Experts Mr. Blok, and Mr. Breu, Mr. Orth and a very special thanks to Mr. Rayburn who finalized the manuscript. This publication has been reviewed most favourably in many technical and scientific magazines and we have received numerous most eulogistic comments about it. In some institutions of higher learning, it has already become a reference book on this subject. This publication, together with the glossary are the first two United Nations publications relying extensively on material made available by the Group in general and by the Working Group on Definitions in particular. Mr. Lewis, its convenor, can really be proud of this fine achievement.

The problem of standardization of geographical names has occupied a prominent place at all United Nations Regional Cartographic Conferences held since 1982, the Third United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for the Americas, the Tenth and the Eleventh United Nations Regional Cartographic Conferences for Asia and the Pacific and the Fifth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Africa.

Many delegates who are present here today attended these conferences and presented on behalf of their respective Governments, technical papers on the Standardization of Geographical Names, or have reported on Divisional activities such as on the First Regional Conference of the Latin American Division of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names held in Havana in 1984.

At these conferences the Secretariat in accordance with the wish of the Group of Experts presented conference room papers on geographical names which had been prepared by Governments and presented at the last conference in Geneva. These documents were mainly topographic guidelines for map and other editors of countries of the region concerned.

At these regional cartographic conferences several resolutions were adopted pertaining to Geographical Names, focusing on the establishment of National Names Authority, on the publication of toponymic guidelines, on training and calling for greater participation of the various countries in the Divisional activities.

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In the field of training, after the pilot training course in toponymy held in Indonesia in 1982, the Department of Technical Co-operation for Development organized in close co-operation with the Government of Morocco, in Rabat in 1986 another very successful training course in Toponymy for Arabic-speaking countries. I will not go into details as it will be presented by Professor Tazi during the Conference. But let me just say that it has been brilliantly directed by Professor Tazi and that it was attended by 120 participants from 15 Arabic-speaking countries. Besides the impressive list of Moroccan lecturers, three international lectures, Professor Saad Abdou from Saudi Arabia, Professor Ormeling from the Netherlands and Mr. Bonnely from Canada contributed also greatly to the success of the training course.

The subject of the Standardization of Geographical Names was also presented at various training courses and seminars organized by the Department for Technical Co-operation for Development. In particular on the occasion of the holding of the United Nations Inter-regional Seminar on the Role of Surveying, Mapping and Charting in Country Development Programming held in Ottawa in November 1985, the standardization of geographical names was one of the subjects studied and it was presented by Mr. Rayburn in his lecture entitled "The Importance of the Geographical Names Authority in Support of Mapping and Charting."

On the occasion of holding of the United Nations Inter-regional Training Course on Thematic Cartography in Moscow in September/October 1983, the standardization of geographical names was also one of the subjects studied and it was presented by Professor Komkov.

With this, I will end this brief outline on the United Nations activities in our field since the last Conference.

Before closing, Mrs. Cestac, Director of the Translation Division, has asked me to convey her best wishes for your successful deliberations and to assure you of her immense interest in all your endeavours. She very much regrets being unable to be present here at the Conference, but Mr. Nigel Cassar, Chief of the Terminology Section at Headquarters is representing the Department of Conference Services, Translation Division, and will be pleased to work with you and to start the third revised and augmented edition of the Glossary.

Finally, I would like to thank the International Congress of Onomastic Sciences for their invitation to a joint session together, and wish also to thank la Commission de Toponymie du Quebec and the Ministère des Relations Internationales et des Affaires Culturelles du Quebec for making it possible through their hospitality.

I would like also to join Dr. Beredjick in asking the Canadian delegation to convey to the Canadian authorities, our profound gratitude for their warm hospitality.

At this point, I wish you all success in your deliberations and assure you that the Secretariat staff is looking forward to working and co-operating closely with each of you during the present Conference.