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EXPERT GROUP ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES BEGINS SIXTH SESSION

The United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names began its Sixth Session, in closed meetings, at United Nations Headquarters this morning to continue its efforts to achieve "one single written form of every geographical name on the earth and of topographical names of other bodies of the solar system by means of national standardization and/or international agreement". The Group is scheduled to meet until 26 March.

Forty-two experts from 24 countries, representing the 15 linguistic/geographical divisions into which the Group has divided the world are attending the session. The 15 divisions are: United States and Canada; Latin America; United Kingdom; Dutch and German-speaking; Norden; Romance languages area, other than Latin America; Europe East Central and South-East; Union of Soviet Socialist Republics; Arabic; Asia South-West, other than Arabic; Indian; Asia South East; China; Africa East; and Africa West.

This morning the Group heard a progress report by Meredith F. Burril (United States), its chairman. Mr. Burril was also Chairman of the Group at its last session, held at United Nations Headquarters in 1973.

At its last session began preliminary work looking towards the publication of United Nations gazetteers of the world. It also recommended the establishment of a series of training courses on toponymy -- the study of place names.

In addition to four pre-existing working groups -- on definitions, on single romanization systems, on extraterrestrial topographic features and on names of undersea and maritime features -- the experts at their last session set up three new working groups -- on international gazetteers, on training courses in toponymy, and on a list of country names in local official languages and in the official languages of the United Nations.

(more)

The Group plans to convene a further session in 1976 to prepare for the Third United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, which is scheduled for Athens in June 1977. The second such conference was held in May 1972 in London.

The working group on gazetteers has been elaborating specifications for three types of gazetteers -- national gazetteers, a series of United Nations gazetteers of the world for international reference use, and a concise United Nations gazetteer of the world in one or two volumes. The aim of these publications would be to list official standard names for places and natural features.

At the current session in New York the Group will discuss reports on the activity of its working groups during the past two years, publication of a list of gazetteers and glossaries, reduction of exonyms (conventional or traditional names), the provisional agenda for the Third United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, and the provisional agenda for the next session of the Group of Experts.

"During the session, the Group expects to hear from a representative of the International Astronomical Union on the matter of international responsibility for the naming of lunar features."

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