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2nd Meeting (PM)

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CONFERENCE ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES CONTINUES

DEBATE ON USE OF TERMS

Reference to 'Macedonia', 'Taiwan' Among Issues Discussed

The issue of the status of the "Republic of Macedonia" was brought up this afternoon in the Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. The representative of the United Kingdom, speaking on behalf of the European Community, said Macedonia had not been recognized largely because of its use of the name "Macedonia", even though its boundaries were recognized by the European Community.

The representative of Greece, endorsing the position of the United Kingdom, urged the Conference to avoid the usage of terms which contained political implications. The remarks were made as the Conference considered a list of country names used by the Thai Geographical Gazetteer Committee.

During consideration of the same list, the representative of China said Taiwan was a part of China and should not be listed as a country. A representative of the Office of the Department of Conference Services said that at the United Nations the term used was "Taiwan, Province of China".

Other issues discussed were the recording of native names in the Roman alphabet, the preparation of gazetteers -- compendiums of names, features and "locative information" -- and the results of a questionnaire on toponymic database usage.

Reports were also presented this afternoon by the representatives of Canada, United States, Germany, Austria, Romania, Greece, Israel and Hungary.

The Conference will meet again at a time to be announced in the Journal.

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RICHARD RANDALL, Executive Secretary of the United States Board of Geographic Names, Defense Mapping Agency, said his country had embarked on a programme to produce gazetteers -- compendiums of names, features and "locative information" -- over a number of years. He introduced a paper which described that programme and contained a list of gazetteers which had been produced in the United States since 1987. Gazetteers came in many formats -- some were glossy and contained colour photographs, while others were more "bare-bones" publications. The gazetteers produced in the United States involved use of the Roman alphabet and were designed for general use. The production of gazetteers was time-consuming, involving transliteration and extensive research. More recently, gazetteers were being produced at the request of Latin American countries seeking to deal with drug trafficking. Gazetteers produced by the United States were not distributed free but were widely available.

To a question on pronunciation codes in gazetteers, Mr. Randell said an attempt had been made to work with standardized pronunciation. There were many names which involved subtle changes of tone that were generally beyond the scope of the average person. Although the provision of pronunciation would be useful, the United States was currently concentrating on providing accurate written records.

HELMUT DESOYE, Chairman of the Board of Geographical Names of the Austrian Cartographic Commission, introduced a paper on the comparative multilingual gazetteer of the geographical names of the Danubian countries. The paper contained exonyms in German, English, French and Russian.

SERBAN DRAGOMIRESCU, of the Académie Roumaine, presented a report on geographical names in his country. Names of counties, capitals, municipalities and towns were all provided. The report also addressed the types of terminology used in Romania.

Ms. KERFOOT (Canada), introducing the illustrated dictionary of Quebec place names, said the dictionary would comprise 6,000 entries. Due for publication in 1993, it would contain 34 pages of maps of Quebec, bearing all the official names of the entries. There would also be 450 illustrations, half of them in colour. She said a lot of work had gone into compiling the dictionary, which would contain a great deal of information.

JOHN THEOPHANOPOULOS (Greece) introduced the list of country names and capitals used by Greece. The list contained names in the official language of the country, in Greek, and, finally, transliterated into Latin.

PRASONG CHINGCHAI, Attaché to the Royal Thai Survey Department of the Ministry of Defence of Thailand, presented a list of country names, with their Thai equivalents, prepared by the Thai Geographical Gazetteer Committee. He said the list contained one error; the entry of "Republic of Macedonia" should be deleted from the list.

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Asked to what extent the United Nations Translation Services had been involved in the preparation of the glossary, he said the Working Group was an autonomous body, but was assisted by the United Nations Secretariat.

Mr. PAYNE (United States), introducing the report of the Terminology Committee of the Place Name Survey of the United States, said its members had determined that there should be an official list of terms and definitions, for use by scholars and practitioners alike. The list should be an officially sanctioned guide for reference by serious scholars, amateur toponymists and those who required a general reference, such as media announcers.

The Committee had realized that the official list was dynamic and, therefore, must be updated and maintained by an organization capable of providing the necessary expertise and administrative support, he said. The Committee had further recommended that it would be prudent to adopt and use terms and definitions accepted by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names whenever possible. Finally, he said the goal should be to publish a dictionary of toponymic terms.

Responding to questions, he said the Committee was in no way affiliated to the United States Government. He also told another questioner that nothing had been adopted by the Committee, pending the outcome of the current Conference, even though there was support for a broader list of place names.

BELA POKOLY (Hungary) presented a report containing remarks on definitions. The remarks referred to the glossary on technical terminology and recommended the deletion of certain terms used in the glossary.

GERD QUINTING, Scientific Linguist, Geographic Names Branch of the United States Defense Mapping Agency, introduced a report on linguistic terminology in toponymy. He said linguists used an agreed-upon terminology despite occasional variance in usage. The problem of terminology was more acute in linguistics than in other fields since the linguist, in studying language, was using language uniquely as an analytical tool. Corrections, additions and deletions of terms used to describe language must be carried out with caution, as those terms were interlinked and modifying the meaning of one might affect the meaning of another.