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Press Release

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Sixth UN Conference on the
Standardization of Geographical Names
3rd Meeting (AM)

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INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND EDUCATION IN THE STUDY OF PLACE NAMES

DISCUSSED BY CONFERENCE ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Both Koreas Call for 'Readjustment' of Name 'Sea of Japan'

Representatives of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea called for a "readjustment" of the name of the Sea of Japan, for historical reasons, as the Sixth United Nations Conference on Geographical Names continued this morning.

They said the terms "East Sea", "Japan Sea", "Sea of Korea" and "Orient Sea" had all been used over the centuries, and called for negotiations to settle the issue with due regard for the concerns of the Korean people. The representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea stated that the issue was related to colonialism. The representative of Japan said the name "Sea of Japan" was accepted internationally, and any change might give rise to confusion.

This morning, the Conference discussed international cooperation and education in toponymy -- the science of naming geographical features. An educational course in toponymy for southern Africa that had been held in Pretoria from 29 June to 9 July was described by the representatives of South Africa and Israel. The United States and Canada shared details of their cooperation in the treatment of geographical features that were shared by both countries.

Other issues addressed this morning included the naming of undersea features such as oilfields, place names in Antarctica and romanization of the Thai and Korean characters.

Reports were presented by Canada, Germany, Thailand and the United States.

The Conference will continue at 3 p.m. this afternoon when it will discuss writing systems and guides to pronunciation and toponymic practice and international cooperation.

(more)

PETER RAPER (South Africa) said that the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names only had participants from States recognized by the United Nations.

NAFTALI KADMON (Israel) made a slide presentation of the Pretoria course. "Multi-script" maps, computerization using toponymic databases, statistics, maps of rainfall and other cartographic techniques were discussed during the course.

To a question on how the results of the toponymy course would be disseminated, Mr. RAPER (South Africa) said documents emerging from the training course could be purchased and would also be made available for future training courses.

On the subject of geographical features that extended beyond national borders, HELEN KERFOOT, Executive Secretary of the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names, introduced a memorandum of understanding concerning the treatment of names of geographical features shared by her country and the United States. It was signed in 1989, she said, by representatives of the two country's national bodies dealing with geographical names. The agreement took account of the need to preserve differences in cultural heritage and history that might exist. It emphasized the cooperative efforts of the two countries on the question of geographical names. It also recognized the possibility of changes in names and the need for an exchange of information. The agreement also took note of the important role of the mapping programme of the International Boundary Commission

The memorandum of understanding had an annex setting out procedures for handling trans-boundary names, she added.

A representative of the United States said the close collaboration between his country and Canada, exemplified by the agreement, had followed and, perhaps, even anticipated many recommendations of the United Nations in the area of transboundary names.

BYUNG YONG SOH (Republic of Korea) raised the subject of the name of the sea between his country and Japan, which was often referred to as the "Sea of Japan". In the Republic of Korea, he said, it had been called "Tong-Hae", meaning the "East Sea", for several centuries. Over the past four centuries, the sea had been called by several different names -- "Sea of Korea", "Sea of Japan" and "Orient Sea". He cited several examples of usage of the term "Sea of Korea", including some by Japanese cartographers, such as Kasragawa's 1794 map of Asia. During the period between the early seventeenth and later nineteenth centuries, the name "Sea of Korea" had prevailed over "Sea of Japan", but after that, the term "Sea of Japan" was more commonly used.

He said the discrepancy should be addressed, with due regard for the concerns of the Korean people.

HO JONG (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that for the first time, delegations of both Koreas were present at the Conference, and he shared

The United States was aware of the growing interest in the Antarctic region, he said, and did not recognize territorial sovereignty on that continent.

As far as international cooperation was concerned, he said the United States was very active in the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research, an organization which worked towards information exchange on Antarctica.

PRASONG CHINGCHAI, Attaché to the Royal Thai Survey Department of the Ministry of Defence of Thailand, introduced a report on the romanized transliteration of Thai. A system for converting Thai into Roman letters had been developed in order to accurately reflect the Thai language, he said. Since there were fewer Roman letters than Thai characters, diacritics (such as accents and cedillas) and punctuation marks, as well as combinations of Roman characters, were employed.

A second report he introduced covered problems in the existing transcription system and possible improvements to romanized transcriptions of Thai.

Mr. HO (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said his country was making efforts to systematize the romanization of Korean. North and South Korea had been unable to meet extensively on such a system, but a working paper on the subject had been drafted.

Mr. BYUNG (Republic of Korea) said experts from both Koreas had reached agreement on a unified system in June.

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