

SIXTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
New York, 25 August-3 September 1992
Agenda item 15

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE CONFERENCE

Draft report of Committee I

B. Committee I: National programmes

National standardization (item 5)

Field collection of names (item 5 (a))

1. Japan reported (E/CONF.85/L.72) that the National Hydrographic Department and the Geographical Survey Institute form a joint committee, established in 1960, to standardize maps and charts. The names of administrative divisions and populated places were standardized (their orthography and pronunciation) by laws and regulations announced in official reports.
2. The report of Norway (E/CONF.85/L.84) detailed the phases of compilation of the Norwegian Placename Database, established in 1987. This database included all names associated with settlements, farms and natural features, and should not be confused with the Central Placename Register of the Norwegian Mapping Authority. The financing, organization, method of collection, computer register, and the use of the database were described.
3. Canada produced a small-scale reference map (Working paper 27) to show fieldwork accomplished since 1987. Three categories of completeness and reliability were used, based on how the work was undertaken. This information, plotted according to 1:50,000 National Topographic Series map sheet areas and maintained on a regular basis, could be useful to individual jurisdictions in planning their toponymic activities.

4. Canada presented the table of contents (Working paper 28) of a recently completed technical guide for the field collection of aboriginal geographical names. The manual provided a possible approach to authorizing, organizing and undertaking a field survey. The guide also contains sample survey forms. The methodology for this manual was developed through private sector work with the Inuit in northern Canada.

5. Venezuela commented on a programme to collect and standardize the geographical names in the sector of Sierra Parima of the Territorio Federal Amazonas, based on methodology developed by the Pan American Institute of Geography and History. Mexico also commented on research by field scientists in Central Mexico, associated with training courses.

Office treatment of names (item 5 (b))

6. Austria reported on an Austrian standard of country codes (E/CONF.85/L.9), a published list of 17,400 Ortschaften according to communes (E/CONF.85/L.10) and an index of the 2,300 communes (E/CONF.85/L.11).

7. The reports prepared by the Commission de toponymie du Québec (Canada) (E/CONF.85/L.43, E/CONF.85/L.44 and E/CONF.85/L.45) documented the management of toponyms in Quebec, including the programme of commemorative naming, the 1990 expanded edition of the "Guide toponymique du Québec", and the modified policy on the designation of toponyms for living people.

8. Canada reported that the "Principles and procedures for geographical naming", developed by the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names, had been updated in 1990. Those guidelines, already published in English and French, have now been made available in Spanish.

9. The United States of America commented that the software developed in the 1970s for the collection of geographical names from maps and other publications for the Geographical Names Information System contained quality control programmes that had proved beneficial.

Treatment of names in multilingual areas (item 5 (c))

10. Austria reported (E/CONF.85/L.12) that 91 Ortschaften in Carinthia, which had a considerable Slovenian-speaking population, had by decree of the Austrian Government been designated bilingual. Bilingual naming appeared on road signs and would be indicated in the "Gazetteer of Austria".

11. The Commission de toponymie du Québec (Canada) reported (E/CONF.85/L.46) on the revision of its policy on indigenous names, whereby even if these names were not designated as official, they may be widely disseminated as variant names.

12. Canada reported (E/CONF.85/L.74) on aspects of the work of the federal Translation Bureau in the treatment of non-French-language toponyms for translation of texts into French. Guidelines had been developed to provide linguistic consistency, and reference lists would be prepared.
13. Several countries referred to the treatment of toponyms in multilingual areas, and the need was expressed for further cooperative action on this topic.
14. Israel reported (E/CONF.85/L.4) that its national geographical names authority, the Government Names Commission, had been established in 1951. The Commission provided official status to names, which was then binding on all institutions of the Government. Provisions were made for appeal against a ratified name. There was some variation from official names usage by private and even public bodies, such as in tourist literature produced for different languages.
15. Austria referred (E/CONF.85/L.14) to an unofficial brochure prepared to provide information on the Board of Geographical Names and on the institutions represented on the Board, which it was hoped in the future will come under a governmental scientific body.
16. Brazil stated (E/CONF.85/L.78) that its Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) had established a geographical names sector in 1948, which was responsible for the standardization of geographical names. A current project is the inventory and organization of geographical names, which involved the systematic collection, organization, and consolidation of names for physical and cultural features. The information collected was stored in the Territorial Structures Database.
17. Various countries commented on degrees of integration of geographical names, census data, and mapping activities, in order to avoid duplication of efforts.
18. Norway addressed (E/CONF.85/L.85) the Norwegian Place-Name Act passed in 1990. The standardized names were to be based on local pronunciation and current spelling rules in one of the two forms of Norwegian. Spelling rules for Saami and Finnish names were also in place. An Appeals Committee had been set up to deal with complaints about standardized forms of names.
19. The administrative structure of Canada's geographical names standardization included an advisory committee on names for undersea and maritime features. Its scope and functions were described in a brochure available to the public.

Toponymic guidelines for map and other editors (item 5 (e))

20. China reported (E/CONF.85/L.1) that the use of the Chinese phonetic alphabet (Pinyin) since 1977 had resolved confusion in the spelling of Chinese names. Of the 56 nationalities in China, Han constituted 92 per cent of the

population. In Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Tibet and other national autonomous areas, minority scripts (rather than Han) were used to write the place names. Delegates sought clarification of the spelling guidelines in Han, particularly before the letters a, o or e. China was commended for the effort to use the Tibetan language.

21. Toponymic guidelines for the Netherlands were presented (E/CONF.85/L.2). Material was included on names in Frisian, which had official status only in the province of Friesland; those names are standardized by the Toponymic Working Group of the Frisian Academy.

22. Austria referred to its guidelines originally submitted as E/CONF.74/L.2 as a sample of format and content. In E/CONF.85/L.14 and Working paper 41, Austria presented a revision of the guidelines, particularly referring to the adjustment of the linguistic maps to the last census and inclusion of Slovenian minority names in the "Gazetteer of Austria".

23. South Africa reported (E/CONF.74/L.23) that a third edition of the toponymic guidelines had been necessitated by a revision of the orthographic rules of both Afrikaans and Zulu.

24. As coordinator for toponymic guidelines, the representative of South Africa expressed gratification at the increase in the number of toponymic guidelines prepared for the Conference. In view of the importance of such guidelines, he urged countries that had not yet prepared guidelines to do so as soon as possible, and he encouraged the publication of a compendium of these guidelines through the United Nations Secretariat.

25. Canada submitted updated guidelines (E/CONF.85/L.47), noting the addition of abbreviations of generic terms for use on topographic maps and a list of geographical names made official in both English and French.

26. Guidelines for Estonia (E/CONF.85/L.76) were summarized and spelling rules and pronunciation of geographical names in the official language (Estonian) noted. In some areas, names may be standardized in the minority languages of Russian and Swedish.

27. Germany presented full toponymic guidelines (E/CONF.85/L.93) revised and enlarged since the reunification of Germany in 1990. A list of addresses was included for the user who wished further information.

28. Ireland's guidelines (Working Paper 3) were shown to contain information on names in both official languages (Irish and English), with writing conventions and pronunciation guidelines.

29. The United States of America informed the Conference that their 1989 guidelines were still in effect.

Exonyms (item 9)

Categories and degree of use of exonyms (item 9 (a))

30. Even though there was no paper presented on this subject, the Conference received numerous pertinent comments from representatives.

Principles in reducing exonyms (item 9 (b))

31. Israel, aware that exonyms could not be eliminated, proposed (E/CONF.85/L.7) their reduction by using a "donor system", whereby a country recommended a particular list of traditional names for which other countries could use exonyms (preferably as subsidiary forms).

Provisional list of exonyms (item 9 (c))

32. The Dutch- and German-speaking Division presented Working paper 4, revised guidelines for the preparation of lists of exonyms. A clear distinction was made between cartographic publications for national and international use. Although exonyms may appear on products for national use, they should be avoided on tourist maps and in international cartography.

33. The United States of America submitted Working paper 22 listing English-language exonyms deleted, changed and added to the Foreign Place Names File of the United States Board on Geographic Names since 1988. This information complements the "Gazetteer of Conventional Names", of which the third edition was published in 1988. Exonyms (or "conventional names") would be monitored with a view to reduction where appropriate.

34. Working paper 26, "List of Exonyms for Countries, Capitals and Administrative Divisions of Europe", was represented by the Romano-Hellenique Division. At this time, Baltic countries, Yugoslavia and countries formerly in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics had not been considered. The document, prepared by France, received considerable commendation. The initial emphasis was for administrative divisions, other names being the responsibility of individual European countries.

35. The Conference agreed on the usefulness of reducing exonyms, as had been discussed in previous conferences and seminars. However, exonyms may sometimes be used in local communication (for example, for simplification). A steady acceptance of donor names was noted, particularly where they were readily understandable.
