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REPORTS BY DIVISIONS AND GOVERNMENTS ON THE SITUATION IN THEIR
REGIONS AND COUNTRIES AND ON THE PROGRESS MADE IN THE
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES SINCE THE FIFTH CONFERENCE

National Report on Geographical Place Names
in the Sultanate of Oman

(Submitted by Oman)

NATIONAL REPORT ON GEOGRAPHICAL PLACE NAMES IN THE
SULTANATE OF OMAN

1. Names associated with place, endure in the psyche of a nation. It is recognized in the Sultanate of Oman, that recording a place name on a map, is the first stage in ensuring the permanence of the name recorded. It is therefore very important to ensure that the name so recorded, fulfils the following requisite conditions: -

- a) It is unique and distinctive
- b) It is accepted as the name for the place
- c) The form of the word, meets the language standard

2. The populace of the Sultanate culturally, is in part sedentary, being cultivators, and in part mobile, being pastoral people or Bedouin. The natural tendency is for sedentary people to have locally accepted names for topographical features, settlements and other aspects of their environment. The nomads have the same standard for topographical features but carry the place name for their dwelling area with them. This is a problem in place name collection, in most of the Arab countries.

3. We may consider the present situation in the Sultanate of Oman on the following basis.

PLACE NAME COLLECTION

4. Place names have been collected in a very modest way, over the past centuries in support of trade, journeys of

exploration and coastal seafaring. These names appear in scientific journals, government reports and on coastal navigation charts. Subsequent to World War 2, with the advent of oil exploration and production, together with military tension in the Middle East, the need for medium scale maps meant the collection of place names in a more comprehensive and systematic manner.

5. Two series of 1:100,000 scale maps were published, covering in the first instance parts of the north and south of the Sultanate. Later on, coverage of the whole country superseded the earlier series. The place names collection was mostly carried out by non Arabic speakers; hence the phonetic Arabic collected at the source was romanised with simulated pronunciation for the benefit of the English speaking users.

6. Once we have sufficient resources in place in the National Survey Authority, we intend to embark on a programme, to actively collect those geographical place names which are still outstanding at this time, and to verify those currently in use.

DUAL TEXT REQUIREMENT

7. Historically because the most modern mapping technology and map production has come from the West, the outcome has been that the English text has attained pre-eminence at the expense of the national script Arabic. We are working to redress the imbalance,

and all new mapping in the Sultanate has been depicted in dual text; at least since this policy was firmly introduced at the formation of the National Survey Authority in 1985.

NATIONAL BODY FOR GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

8. A National Advisory Body for the confirmation of geographical names has not yet been established in the Sultanate, though the proposed establishment of such an organisation has been discussed at several levels. We hope that this target will be achieved in the foreseeable future, and the Oman Committee for Geographical Names established, and given due recognition.

TRANSLITERATION OF TEXT

9. The Sultanate has inherited the de facto situation whereby the so-called Beirut Convention is used in the West to achieve latinised text from the Arabic original. This has been done of course, simply to achieve a map in latin text. convenient to the western expatriate user: faithfulness to the original Arabic pronunciation being obtained through an elaborate system of diacritical signs. Though the end result; in achieving a complete cyclic progress through the differing languages and sounds must be seen as commendable; we however, in our function as map makers, find the complexity introduced thereby, both time consuming and difficult to deal with, since the narrow transliteration specialisation, tends to create stranglehold

situations, adversely affecting otherwise smooth running map production processes. We have out of necessity ignored this convention particularly as far as diacritical signs are concerned.

ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE SULTANATE OF OMAN

10. Not having the experienced manpower resources to deal with the problem of transliteration, we have endeavoured in the National Survey Authority, to standardise the spelling of the name in use for various settlements, towns and geographical areas of the Sultanate. This has not been easy, but in dedicating our efforts in this way, we have publicised the need for the standardised spelling of place names, and this policy has met with widespread support in the Sultanate.

11. Through the Ministry of the Interior and the Office of the Governor of Dhofar, we have contact still with the grass roots populace living on the land, and through them we hope to achieve in the National Survey Authority, a full compendium of the place names in the Sultanate, through our daily activities or specific projects mounted for the purpose.

PUBLICATIONS

A number of publications and maps related to geographical place names in the Sultanate have been published to date, and we

would like to draw attention in particular to the following,
namely:

a) Series K668 maps at 1:100,000 scale.

77 map sheets in total.

b) Series K6611 maps at 1:100,000 scale.

137 sheets in total.

3. Gazetteer of Oman

Published by the Defense Mapping Agency in March 1976

revised in January 1983: approximately 1510 settlement place
names taken from Series K668 maps.

4. Gazetteer of Wilayats and Tribes.

Published by the Ministry of the Interior. Publication
entirely in Arabic text with over 1880 settlement places
listed.

5. Gazetteer of Wilayats and Tribes.

in English vernacular; not transliterated; internal Ministry
of Defence publication.