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UNITED NATIONS GROUP OF EXPERTS
ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Note on the RYAD Meeting
by Dr. Abdelhadi TAZI, representative of Morocco.

Mr. Chairman,

A Geographical Conference of Islamic States was held in
Ryad (Saoudi Arabia) under the auspices of Imam Mohamed Ibn Saoud
University from January 20th to 25th 1979.

My modest contribution to the Conference was a statement
in which I tried to stress the role of the Islamic Group within the
International Conference on the Normalisation of Geographical Names.
I also took the opportunity of that gathering to report to the
representatives from Arab and Islamic states on the Third United
Nations Conference on Geographical Names held in Athens in the summer
of the year 1977.

At first I felt that my topic was alien to the items discussed by
the Conference but soon I sensed a growing interest among the
participants.

One of the things I drew the attention of my Islamic colleagues
towards was the lack of interest of some of them in what was happening
on the international level, and in particular on the level of the U.N.
Conference on Normalisation of Geographical names. I stressed that we
had a great deal to gain from the international experience and I urged

my colleagues to join the U.N. Conference so that we could promote a true international spirit of co-operation. I also raised the question of the transcription of Arabic words into the Latin alphabet, and there was no major objection to the results achieved in Beirut and to subsequent changes. And although it was not possible for the Arab Group to arrange a special meeting for its members, the Ryad Conference was a suitable forum for an exchange of views.

At the Ryad Conference I raised the question of Exonyms; and it is worthy to note in this regard that the Arab States have eliminated most of these words and are now focusing their attention on the elimination of the remaining exonyms still in use in Arabic.

The idea to set up national commissions in Arab States was launched at the Ryad meeting. These commissions would endeavour to draft a lexicon of the geographical names in use in Arab States.

I praised the interest shown by the U.N. Conference in providing the necessary personnel for the good functioning of the various topographic institutions and also for the particular attention given to the academic development of the subject matter of our Conference.

Mr. Chairman, in response to the request made by some of my colleagues, and especially by Professor Lewis, I promise I shall send you the set of resolutions adopted at the Ryad Conference, though some of them are not particularly related to the work of our present Conference. I also promise to do my best to provide you with a full report on the Ryad Conference to inform you more extensively about the achievements of Arab states in the field of geographical research.