

New York, 26 February-9 March 1979

Agenda item No. 6

UNITED NATIONS SPECIALIST ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

(Submitted by Francis Gall)

1. On occasion of our sixth session held in New York 5-26 March 1975, after much discussion following was decided upon, which did not appear in the final mimeographed text of the Report:

"U.N. Specialist on Geographical Names

29. The Group of Experts noted that there was a pressing need for a specialist on geographical names to be attached to the U.N. Cartography Section. The complexities of place name problems covering the field of toponymy, gazetteer production, training for field work and the automation processes connected with place name spelling, indexing and positioning called for the appointment of a suitably-qualified person to coordinate on such matters. All these topics are closely associated with mapping and surveying in general but their highly specialized character make them a distinct and separate aspects of those subjects".

2. The Group of Experts also directed the Chairman to draft the job description for the position, in the understanding that said specialist would be working directly under the supervision of the Chief of the U.N. Cartography Section.

3. Thus, Dr. Meredith F. Burrill complied with the mandate of the Group of Experts and on 28 March 1975 sent out the details for comment, stating that a time limit of thirty days was allowed for replies before sending the description forward.

4. The idea of the whole Group of Experts has been that Mr. Chris N. Christopher, Chief of the United Nations Cartography Section and Secretary of the Group of Experts is overburdened with heavy work due to his important position, and that he deserved to have a load taken away from him, but continuing to have the supervision of the work.

5. Personally, I believe that Mr. Chris N. Christopher has needed to have a specialist on geographical names work directly under him, due to the fact that his duties as U.N. Chief of Cartography are not only very heavy but also complex and take up every one of his available minutes. In fact, I have had some time ago the privilege of visiting unannounced his Section and noticed that only as far as correspondence of all sorts is concerned, he receives daily a very large amount of same regarding exclusively cartographic matters. And this is only one complete time and effort consuming task which Mr. Christopher carries out. I also noticed that all the staff assigned to the Chief of the Cartography Section works continuously and very efficiently in all the matters related with the science of Cartography.

6. I am positive that a United Nations specialist on geographical names would indeed be a great assistance, due primarily to the heavy burden of work which at the present time has to be performed.

7. Therefore it is not only fair but also imperative to assist the Chief of the Cartography Section in his work as far as our Group of Experts is concerned, whose activities have become more complex and intensive. This is also the reason for urging that we should do our part in this sense.

8. The job description as drafted in March 1975 by Dr. Burrill upon request of the Group of Experts on Geographical Names, reads as follows:

**TITLE:** United Nations Specialist on Geographical Names.

**PLACE:** New York, N.Y.

**TERM:** One year with possibility of extension.

**DUTIES:** Under the supervision of the Chief of the Cartography Section, to advise in the field of toponymy; to coordinate production of gazetteers on national and international levels in conformity with guidelines set down by the Group of Experts on Geographical Names; to assist in the preparation and organization of training courses; to prepare reports and studies on geographic name automation processes connected with place name spelling, indexing and automated positioning.

**QUALIFICATIONS:** A university education or its equivalent in two or more of the fields of geography, linguistics and cartography.

**EXPERIENCE:** Broad experience in geographical name standardization on both national and international levels is an indispensable prerequisite.

**BACKGROUND**

**OF PROPOSAL:** The United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (GEGN) has noted that there is a pressing need for the United Nations to stimulate and encourage the developing countries in their geographical name standardization activities. The GEGN considers it vital that a specialist who during his years of experience with mapping and surveying work in general and toponymy in particular has acquired qualifications of highly specialized character undertake studies recommended by United Nations Conferences on Standardization of Geographical Names or by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.

9. I urge therefore all the Experts present at this eighth session, to consider this matter anew and to reiterate the existing extremely urgent need for a United Nations Specialist on Geographical Names as outlined in this working paper and taking also into consideration Dr. Burrill's statement regarding background of proposal. If necessary, the facts herein mentioned should be presented for an immediate favorable action, to the attention of the United Nations Economic and Social Council and/or even a positive recommendation by the Secretary General.