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English only

**Eighth United Nations Conference on the
Standardization of Geographical Names**

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Item 4 of the provisional agenda*

**Reports by Governments on the situation in their countries
and on the progress made in the standardization of
geographical names since the Seventh Conference**

Report of Japan

Submitted by Japan

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The geographical names that people use daily in Japan include innumerable names of housing areas, natural features, and names that are only used locally, although the actual number is uncertain. The collection, arrangement, and standardization of these names promote and enhance economic and social activities, and also support the excavation and preservation efforts of historical and cultural assets.

While there is no single organization that is engaged in collection, arrangement, and standardization of geographical names, several organizations performing these tasks are promoting coordinated efforts among themselves. This, as a result, has greatly contributed to standardization of geographical names.

(1) Standardization of residential geographical names

The names of administrative units of municipalities and their hierarchical details such as town divisions (cho), blocks (chome), village division (oaza), and village blocks (aza), that is, the names of residential areas, are regulated by the law, and new place names and their boundaries are published in official gazettes of the national and prefectural governments. Given this kind of legal control, there should be no confusion resulting from differences in pronunciations, characters and etc., for residential geographical names.

(2) Unification of geographical names of natural features

The Geographical Survey Institute compiles maps of land areas, and the Hydrographic and Oceanographic Department of the Japan Coast Guard compiles maps of mostly marine areas: there have been some discrepancies in geographical names used on the maps prepared separately by the two agencies. Therefore, in 1960 they agreed to establish the Joint Committee on the Standardization of Geographical Names, which meets once or twice a year.

The committee surveyed and reviewed about 6,000 geographical names at the 1:500,000 map scale, completing the task of standardization at this level in 1978. Then the same efforts were started for the maps of 1:25,000 scale, but since progress has been slow, it

was decided at the 63rd meeting, held in March 2002, to focus on the standardization of geographical names of 1:200,000 map scale.

Since the 7th UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names of 1998, the names of 113 places have been finalized, bringing the current total of standardized names to 23,800.

(3) Adoption of maritime geographical names

Undersea features discovered or surveyed by Japan's maritime survey organizations are given official names by the Hydrographic and Oceanographic Department of the Japan Coast Guard, based on the recommendations of the Advisory Board on Geographical Names in Oceans and Seas. The committee refers to "The Standardization of Undersea Features" for deliberation, which was prepared jointly by the GEBCO Sub-Committee on Geographical Names and Nomenclature of Ocean Bottom Features and the Working Group on Maritime and Undersea Features of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN)."

Since the 7th UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names of 1998, 17 undersea landforms have been newly named, current total of 1,233 undersea landform names.

(4) Adoption of Antarctic geographical names

With the exception of geographical features found in the region south of 60 degrees S that have either been named by other countries or internationally approved, the topographical features discovered by Japanese Antarctic Research Expedition (JARE) and points of major geodetic or observational interest are tentatively named based on the "Rules for the Naming of Antarctic Geographical Features." These tentative names are submitted by the Committee for Naming Antarctic Places to the Headquarters of JARE, which decides on the official names.

Currently, 313 names have been finalized.

Automatic Processing of Geographical Names (tentative agenda No. 12)

The increased use of computer systems in the private and public sectors has promoted development of database of geographical names and associated information. The following is an introduction to some of the main databases of geographical names developed in Japan.

(1) Geographical name database for administrative units

There are roughly 3,200 municipalities in Japan. The administrative code numbers that correspond to each one of them are established by JIS (Japan Industrial Standards). Names and other information are compiled into databases by the local governments for wide use.

The databases for geographical names within the respective administrative boundaries are created by the relevant organizations of the Ministry of Public Management Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications. These databases contain classifications, spelling, pronunciations, etc. of geographical names (about 480,000 at present) that are compiled and managed as the "cho" and "aza" files nationwide.

The databases for geographical names of natural features consist of classification, spelling, pronunciation, administrative code, administrative name, and topographical and regional map names that have been finalized at the Joint Committee on the Standardization of Geographical Names organized by the Geographical Survey Institute and the Hydrographic and Oceanographic Department of the Japan Coast Guard.

(2) Geographical name database with geographical coordinates

In 2000, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport began development of positional coordinates data at street and block level for the urban areas of Japan, which covers an area of approximately 97,000 km². The project, which was completed in March 2002, aimed at giving the coordinate values (latitude and longitude of the representative points on the streets and blocks, values of Cartesian coordinates.)

Starting in April 2001, the data are being released without charge to the public through

the Internet as they are made available.

In 2000, the Geographical Survey Institute developed and released the database of about 470,000 geographical names given on the 4,352 sheets of topographical maps (1:25,000 scale) that cover Japan's entire area (about 378,000 km²), as well as of the public facilities of about 100,000. This database lists spelling, pronunciations, and geographical coordinates of the representative points.

In 2001, the Geographical Survey Institute began developing and publishing vector map data (spatial data framework) at 1:25,000 scale, which is scheduled to be completed and released for the whole area of Japan by the end of March 2003. The database above mentioned of the geographical names and public facilities is incorporated in this database.

(3) Geographical name database that can show an area corresponding to each name

In 2000, the Geographical Survey Institute developed and published vector map data (spatial data framework) at 1:2,500 scale for the urban areas of Japan, roughly 97,000 km² in total. To enable address matching of the names of administrative units and their sub-divisions, linkages have been made with administrative boundary polygon data for the most densely populated areas (about 2,000 km²) such as Tokyo metropolitan area, Osaka city, and Nagoya city.

These data are open to the public free of charge through the Internet since March 2002.