

23 August 2002

Original: English

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Eighth United Nations Conference on the  
Standardization of Geographical Names  
Berlin, 27 August-5 September 2002  
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

Country Report of Vietnam

(Submitted by Vietnam)



## **COUNTRY REPORT**

### **STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES IN VIETNAM**

#### **I. BACK GROUND**

Vietnam is located in the center of the Southeast Asia region. It lies in the eastern part of the Indochina peninsular bordering China to the North, Laos and Cambodia to the West and East Sea and Pacific Ocean to the East and South.

Inland area: 33 1,668 square kilometers;

Continental shelf area: 700,000 square kilometers;

Vietnam coastline is 3,260 kilometers long; the country's total length as bird flies is 1,659 kilometers from the Northeast to the Southeast points. Its width, stretching from the eastern coast to the western border (continental self area is not included) is 600 kilometers at the widest place in the North and 50 kilometers at the narrowest in the Quang Binh province on the central coast.

Population of Vietnam is about 80 millions; there are 54 ethnic groups; every group has its own language and some of them have their own writing. The Kinh peoples who speaking Vietnamese are accounted for more than 80% of the country's population, they live mostly in urban, delta areas and in mountain valleys.

The Vietnamese (Kinh or Viet) is a common official language of the country.

There were 2 script system in Vietnam. In the past Vietnamese used Han Nom scripts, which has original generation from Chinese. Han Thuyen was the first Vietnamese, who invented the way to record Vietnamese speaking by using writing symbols similar to Chinese, called Han Nom. The Han Nom had used for rather long time in Vietnam. But it had many disadvantages and required people who wanted to use it have had to know Chinese.

The present Vietnamese writing (national writing - as it is called in Vietnam) has been appeared at beginning of seventeenth century. Two missionaries from Italy Gaspad' Arnarai and Portugal Atonio de Barbosa on their way of Preach religion to Vietnam have worked out their own book of alphabets using to record Vietnamese speaking, which were called Lusiiianum-Annammitacium Lustanium (Vietnamese-Portuguese script). Following them Alexandre de Rhodes (a French missionary) has summed up their experience and completed it by adding pronunciation.

There were 3 periods of Vietnamese national writing appearance:

Before 1651, the writing was used without diacritic marks.

From middle of Seventeenth century to Eighteenth century, the writing has started using diacritic marks.

From Eighteenth century to Nineteenth century, the writing has been completed as it is at present.

Vietnamese national writing is the writing to record a sound of voice based on Latin alphabet with system of diacritic marks, defined difference sound of the voice.

Last studies on Vietnamese language showed that although Vietnamese national writing has many advantages it has some irrational problems such as:

- Not fully following the phonetic rules for example one symbol showing not only one syllable, for instant syllable /k/ may be presented by difference letters: c, q, k or one letter may be used for recording two syllables, for instant letter “g” is used for recording syllable /g/ in the words “ga”, “gay go” and /z/ in the words “gia”, “day” etc.

- Some old syllables has already disappeared or are not popular now but still available in writing such as the words used letters d, gi, pl etc.

- Too many diacritical marks resulting difficulties in writing and printing.

Present Vietnamese national writing uses Latin scripts consist of alphabet system and diacritical marks as following:

a, ã, â, b, c, d, đ, e, ê, g, h, i, k, m, n, o, ô, õ, p, q, r, t, u, ư, v, x, y.

Circumflex accent (^, ', ~); acute accent ('); grave accent ('); falling accent (?); rising accent(~); and drop tone (.)

However there are not difficult combinations of consonants (for exp. double, mute consonants) and not b, d, l, r, s at the end of syllable.

53 ethnic minorities in general speak Vietnamese in addition to their own language. They have a right to develop their own languages and script. At present there are 8 ethnic minorities have their own script system. Among them except 2 scripts using arabic type, 6 another using Latin alphabet, their structure of syllable looks like French.

From above characteristics of Vietnamese languages, there are some differences in common nouns referring to one geographical feature, for exp.:

- Referring to “village” there are: *Zđng* (in the plain areas), *hđn, mường, chiềng, chđi* (in the Northern mountain areas); *buôn, plei, kon* (in the Western plateau).

- Referring to “river” there are: *sđng, suối, ngòi* (in the plain areas); *nam, khuổi, pác* (in the Northern mountain areas); *khe or khê, rào* (in the Central mountain areas); *ia, ea, ya, đạ, dak, không* (in the Western plateau); *giang, hà* (from Han origin).

- Referring to “mountain” there are; *núi* (in the plain areas); *pu, phu, bù, pia, phia, khao, khau* (in the Northern and Central mountain areas); *ngoc, chư* (in the Western plateau); *san, Zinh* (from Han origin).

Due to the fact that Vietnam is multilingual country the problem of Standardization Geographical names is one of large problem.

For a long time there was not any authority specialising in toponymy research and not a state organization which is responsible in giving decisions to use geographical names in Vietnam. Every ministry/branch has its own research and regulation on the use of geographical names in compliance with their respective technical of view. Therefore, there is no uniform system of geographical names in fact presented in the documents in Vietnam. There are many discussions and ununiform relevant to the use geographical names. This fact has been continued up to January 22, 2002 when the Decree 12/2002/ND-CP on state Survey and mapping activities has issued by Vietnamese Government. This Decree has been assigned and stipulated the General Department of land Administration (GDLA) as an State Organization responsible for use geographical names.

### ***The General Department of land Administration (GDLA)***

The General Department of land Administration (GDLA) is established under the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and based on merger and reorganization of the former General Department of land Management and the State Department of Survey and Mapping since 1994. It is responsible for the following issues :

- Formulation of land development strategy and planning.'
- Appraisal of the land use planning proposed by the ministries, organizations at ministerial level, organizations under Government or People's Committees of provinces and cities under central authority. Submission of the land allocation, lease and resumption to the Government.
- Promulgation of criteria, technical instructions and process, technical-economic norms of the land administration sector, conduction, guidance and review of the implementation of different branches, localities, organizations and citizen in order to keep the land management and use, and surveying - mapping in compliance with the legislation.
- Organization for the implementation of land investigation, survey, evaluation and classification, cadastral mapping and records, issuance of land tenure certificates; land allocation, lease and resumption.
- Organization for the establishment and management of the control network of coordinates, elevation and gravity, aerial photography; production and publishing of the following: in-land and sea-bed topographic map, administrative map and other thematic maps.
- Management and conduction of science-technological research on land management and surveying-mapping; and of international relations within land administration field.

Collection, retrieval and archives of land administration documentation including the basis data of land, surveying-mapping, and aerial-satellite images on land.

Management of the organization, personnel and staff training in the field of land administration.

- Organization and conduction of the revision and inspection on the law implementation regarding the land management, land use and surveying-mapping.

Management of the business and production units under the General Department of Land Administration.

And recently according to the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Vietnamese the GDLA is

Responsible'for use geographical names

GDLA has 8 administrative units (state administration units) with the 2nd branch of administration office in Ho chi Minh city; 7 institutional units and 4 business and production units (See appendix 1: organization chart of GDLA).

The staff of the central authority of GDLA consists of 2850 persons among them 1,2% higher university education; 23,5 % university education; special high school education; \_\_\_\_\_ workers (surveyors).

Provincial Departments of Land Administration established in 61 provinces and cities under central authority. \_\_\_\_\_ Offices of Land Administration established in 530 districts, and, every commune has 1 land

Therefore the staff at local level consist of:

3000 persons at provincial level,

2000 persons \_\_\_\_\_ level,

9500 persons at communal level.

## 11. STANDARDIZATION GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES IN VIETNAM

Although Vietnam has been participated in some Region Meetings on Standardization of geographical names such as: Seventh meeting of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names for Asia, South-East and the \_\_\_\_\_ Division hold in \_\_\_\_\_ from 7-8 May, 1994; Eighth Meeting of UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names for South-East Asia and the \_\_\_\_\_ South-West Division hold in Jakarta, Indonesia from 12-13 June, 1996. There is no organization specialized in the work of geographical names. However this work still includes in the mapping and land management activities of GDLA as an ordinary work. Thus, there are several works have been completed by State Department of \_\_\_\_\_ and Mapping \_\_\_\_\_ (GDLA) and by GDLA for mapping purpose such as:

- Names catalogue of cities, towns, subtowns, districts.
- Names catalogue of all communes in the country.
- Names of main rivers and lakes in
- Names catalogue of the Vietnamese Islands and archipelago.
- Names catalogue of the capitals and big cities in the world.

GDLA has also issued direction and guidelines for settlement of the typical matters in the field of geographical names for their use in survey and mapping in compliance with some provisional principles:

***provisional principles of naming:***

1. *names:*

- Using the same names and the same writing as they are officially used in the statistical, administrative documents of the Government or local Administration Authorities.
- Using Vietnamese scripts to transcribe geographical names called by people of ethnic minorities in their living areas such as Viet, Khme, Cham, etc.
- Using scripts of the ethnic minorities which have a structure in Latin alphabet to describe the names of their living areas. For example:
  - Pu Sam Sao (Sam Sao mountain), Ana (Ana river), Dak Bla (Bla river).

2. *Geographical names of foreign countries:*

- Using conventional names called by Vietnamese for long time. For example:
  - Trung - China
  - - Japan
  - Nga
  - - France, ...
- Transliterating foreign names into Vietnamese. This is most popular. For example:
  - New York -
  - London - Luan
  - Paris - Pa Ri, ...

**Note:** *the Vietnamese scripts have no combination of consonants like: bl, kr, bb, ll, cc... and also have no some at the end of such as b, d, l, r, s, so transcription of original names may have in use for most vietnamese people to read them. At present the problem of using transcription or original version is still a discussion in the country.*

New geographical names in Vietnam (essentially names of the administrative units) are being named by Governmental Board of Personnel

and Organization. Other ministries and state organizations has it's own regulation on the use of geographical names in compliance with their respective technical of view.

This results to the fact that geographical names are used in very difference ways event on the state public communication means such as on newspapers, TV, radio, etc. Differences of using names could be seen in school books, on the maps printed by difference publishing houses and other documents. Differences could be found even on the official documents of Central and Local Adminttative Authorities.

Recognizing a serious ununitom situation of use geographical names there were many organizations and persons have been carried out their study on it. They suggest difference ways of use geographical names. The following are some typical studies which have been published or have been completed recently:

1. Countries in the world - Truth Publishing house -
2. Names of the countries and countries capitals - State Department of Survey and Mapping (presently GDLA) 1991.
3. Geographical names of foreign countries - by Nguyen Van Khoang, Nguyen Trung Thuan - Culture-Communication publishing house, Hanoi, 1995.
4. Notebook of foreign geographical names, by Nguyễn Duoc, Education publishing house, Hanoi 1998.
5. Study on languages of ethnic groups in Vietnam- by Tran Tri Doi, Hanoi University Publishing house, 1999.
6. Study on transcription of geographical names using for atlases and maps of small scales, Research Institute of Land Administration, GDLA, 1999
7. Summary study on original generation of geographical names in Mekong delta, by Bui Duc Tinh, Ho Chi Minh Cities Culture publishing house, 1999.
8. English-Vietnamese Encyclopaedia of geographical and personnel names, Culture-Communication publishing house, Hanoi, 2000.
9. On going to Standardization of writing geographical names of the ethnic minorities on the Vietnamese documents. Summary studies of the Vietnamese linguistic Association, 2001.

### *of geographical naming in Vietnam*

Vietnamese organizations have got many difference ways to deal with geographical names but generally there are 7 in geographical naming as in other countries, depend on certain circumstances. They are the following:

1. Naming objects: to name new objects or rename old objects such as names of the new administrative units, names of streets etc.



2. Keeping traditional names: many foreign geographical names appeared and have been used for a long time in Vietnam. They very in every day life of people such as the names of the continents, names of the countries capitals or big cities etc. These names tend to be remained the same as they appeared.
3. Keeping names as original writing: this principle is for query and study but not every language could easy to use by user such as writing of names in non-roman writing system or in unwritten languages.
4. Transcription through languages: depend on certain language there have been used a certain intermediate language. In the past Vietnam used to use Chinese and French as an Intermediate language. Recently start using Latin scripts following UN pronounce guideline. There are still in transfer some languages into Vietnamese because of their own character such as Russian and French which has no syllable “H” or syllable changing before stress of vowel or consonant etc.
5. Translation of the name meaning: this principle has used in the past, at present it rarely used because reader understands the meaning when reads it but they can not communicate by hearing or speaking.
6. Transcription: transfer original language into used language by using similar syllables. This is the most popular principle and suitable to Latin, Slavo linguistic groups. But there is some special characteristics in English when reading is not the same as writing, therefore not easy to transcribe. For example “Alabama” transcribed in to Vietnamese is “ lo: bơ  
What is a quite difference in scripts.
7. Writing rules: this a compelled principle of writing names of administrative units in Vietnam, recently it is going to get the same power to the names of foreign countries.

Recent valuable study on Standardization of geographical names in Vietnam was study on Standardization of writing geographical names of the ethnic minorities on Vietnamese documents. This study has been carried out by Vietnamese Linguistic Association. The GDLA is carrying out a study on Legislation of geographical naming in Vietnam and Standardization of writing Geographical names of Vietnam and Indo-China on the map of scale and smaller. The GDLA is also taking part in naming Vietnamese Islands and archipelago. These works will be completed by the

### III. CONCLUSION

There are a lot of things we have to deal with geographical names in Vietnam especially when GDLA has just been assigned by Vietnamese

Government for geographical naming. In near coming time, GDLA will establish a special division, which is specialized for geographical naming and is responsible to solve all problems relevant to the geographical names. Concerning this matter GDLA need to learn and follow the rules and regulations of geographical naming of UN on Standardization of Geographical names. GDLA also need to take in to account of use the provisional of geographical naming in very flexible way. all these measures will be of to Standardization Geographical names in Vietnam.

**APPENDIX 1**

**ORGANIZATION CHART OF**

**DIRECTOR GENERAL**

