

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

New York, 21 - 30 August 2007

Item 5 of the provisional agenda*

**Reports by divisions of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical
Names on the situation in their divisions and on the progress made in the
standardization of geographical names since the Eighth Conference**

Report of Arabic Division

Submitted by the Arabic Division**

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United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names UNGEGN

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New York 21 – 30 August 2007

The Arabic division of United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names has recorded, since 8th Conference in Berlin and 23rd session in Vienna, various activities in both local and international levels that may be summarized as follows:

(1) On local level three main events have taken place:

- i. The Second Arabic Conference on Geographical Names and a meeting of Arabic division of UNGEGN were organized in Tripoli Libya on December 2004 by Survey of Libya. The conference aimed to unify systems and mechanisms of writing geographical names for their accurate use on maps, charts, texts, and in broadcasting, on both Arabic and International levels. Items discussed in the conference are:
 - National reports on progress of standardization of geographical names.
 - Romanization of Geographical names.
 - Technologies for map productions and writing geographical names on maps and charts.
 - Methodology for collecting geographical names.
 - Cooperation between Arab states in the field of geographical names.

The conference came out with various resolutions and recommendations and the meeting of the division with important decisions.

- ii. A meeting of Arabic division took place in Tunis in the presence of Chair and Vice Chair of UNGEGN in April 2007 during the international conference of geographical names organized by African Organization of Cartography (AOCRS) and Regional Center of Remote Sensing and for North African States(RCRSNAS). Various matters were discussed in preparation for Beirut Third Arab Conference on geographical names (May 2007), and New York Ninth UN Conference (August 2007).

Some Seventy Arab experts from nine Arab countries participated in a toponymy course organized during the conference with support and under supervision of the UNGEGN working group on training courses in toponymy.

Chair and Vice-Chair of UNGEGN met during the conference with director General of the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO). They discussed ways of organizing a meeting for Arab countries to adopt Beirut system of Romanization.

The Arabic division would like on this occasion to present its thanks to AOCRS, RCRSNAS and UNGEGN for giving the opportunity to a number of Arab experts on geographical names to participate in the toponymy course.

- iii. Members of Arabic Division participated in Beirut third Arab conference on geographical names held on 30-31 May 2007 which was organized by directorate of geographical affairs of Lebanese Army. A representative of the secretary general of Arab league attended the conference. Most of Arab countries active in standardization of geographical names participated in the conference in which many scientific papers related to geographical names were presented. Standardization of writing and pronunciation of Arabic geographical names and creating Arabic system for Romanization and establishing a bylaw for Arabic Division were among issues discussed in the conference. Beirut Arabic Romanization System was adopted by the experts who attended the conference and will be used in Arab countries after having it approved by Arab League. An office for Arabic division was established with five members and seven working groups.

(2) On international level, It has been recorded participation of some Arab experts to some geographical names events like:

- i. Conference on names of seas held in South Korea in 2006.
- ii. Symposium on names of seas held in Vienna on April 2007.

(3) Besides above mentioned activities some examples of activities of some Arab countries follows:

Jordan

Many maps with different scales for different areas of the Jordanian Hashemite kingdom and for different purposes have been accomplished. These maps contain data base for geographical names, some of them carry names in Arabic and what meet them in Latin alphabets.

An electronic site of the National Jordanian Committee for Geographical Names has been constructed through the electronic site of the Royal Jordanian Geographical Center (<http://www.rigc.gov.jo>).

Atlases of Jordan and the world have been published with names written as per Arabic romanization system.

A training course on name romanization in the kingdom has been organized.

Jordan has participated with scientific papers in some regional and international events in the field of geographical names (Korea 2006, Austria 2007, Lebanon 2007)

Emirates

Because of the rise of urban developmental witnessed by United Arab Emirates, geographical names have started taking their role in some governmental and private organizations. The demand on documented geographical names for some old areas of the state became an important matter in order to protect these names from the forgetfulness and extinction. From this starting point, and since the eighties of last century, some governmental organizations have started collecting and editing geographical names in some areas of the state. Many projects related to geographical names are run by governmental organization like Military Survey, planning agencies, municipalities and Abu Dhabi organization for culture and heritage. All these sectors use 1972 Beirut Arabic Romanization System in documenting geographical names.

The number of geographical names on the land and regional water of the state is estimated to be 70000. About 7500 names have been documented.

United Arab Emirates has participated in various regional and international conferences and workshops about geographical names, like conference of seas held in Vienna on April 2007, Tunis Conference on geographical names on April 2007 and Third Arabic Conference of geographical names held in Beirut on May 2007.

Tunisia

The Tunisian National Committee for Standardization of Geographical Names was established in 1983 and is formed by representatives of sectors dealing with geographical sciences, mainly National Center of Remote Sensing and Office of Surveying and mapping.

After a chain of meetings and participation in many international events in the field of geographical names, it has been decided on using 1972 Beirut system for romanization of Arabic geographical names. Maps of Tunisia at different scales were produced using this system and taking in consideration their local pronunciation.

In spite of this, the system does not include all sectors dealing with geographical information. This returns to difficulties of getting use to the system which seems to be complicated comparing with romanization system in French pronunciation

Algeria

In last two years, Algeria has recorded many activities on both national and international levels.

On national level, a conference on geographical names was organized in Algiers. Many important decisions were taken among which the creation of a national permanent organ that deals with national geographic names.

On international level, Algeria has participated in various scientific activities of geographical names like the toponymy course held in Tunis in April 2007 and Beirut conference in May 2007.

Saudi Arabia

Because of their importance in defining different geographical features, geographical names in kingdom of Saudi Arabia have been enjoying care and interest since long time. Scientists and researchers wrote, in individual efforts, many dictionaries describing and documenting geographical names.

Today, after the comprehensive rise that has been witnessed by the kingdom during which the country has been covered with maps for different purposes, geographical names are getting complete interest by governmental agencies dealing with geographical names like General Department of Military Survey and Saudi Arabia Geological Survey Authority. This interest was shown through the documentation of geographical names and the development of programs dealing with them in different ways. Among these programs are the releasing of a six-volume encyclopedia of more than 72 thousand names of places collected from base maps of the kingdom, and the preparation and development of explorer computer software supplied with topographic maps covering all lands of the kingdom and containing some 80 thousand field checked geographical names to be the base of complete, updated and accurate geographical information serving researchers and all governmental sectors.

Sudan

Many works and activities related to geographical names have been accomplished in Sudan:

- Designation and forming of sub-committees in all states of Sudan to assist the National Council for Geographical Names in performing of its work.
- Review of some 70 thousand field collected geographical names in all Sudanese geographical regions. As first part of data base project, All these geographical names are stored in the computer. They will be edited when the system is approved.
- Running a project of naming and renaming streets and squares of large cities, and in cities of Khartoum state with the help of state subcommittee which was chaired by state minister for engineering affairs
- Modifying Beirut system so that names in south and west of Sudan may be corrected.

Qatar

The State of Qatar has completed the collection and archiving of the geographical names. The total number of collected names is 3466. Tables have been prepared containing all geographical names in Arabic and Latin according to approved Beirut Romanization System revised in 2002 . The tables also contain types and geographical coordinates of the feature.

Lebanon

All Lebanese geographical names are collected and edited on maps. The number of collected and edited names now is 37000, this is in increase of 9000 names comparing to approved 2004 lists. All names have been re-edited in Arabic as per original pronunciation and reconciled in pursuant to laws as they were officially written. Names were written in new system according to the modification agreed upon by the Arab experts in Berlin on 2002. On this frame, paper and electronic lists were completed including:

- Names in Arabic
- Names as per IGN system which has been agreed upon with an agreement between IGN and Lebanese government in 1963.
- Romanized name as per new system

Directorate of geographical affairs started applying the new system on new topographic and other maps. This system will be generalized in state and private schools as well as universities so that students may be able to read romanized names on maps.

Libya

The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya has showed great interest in geographical names since the establishment of Survey Of Libya in early seventies of last century. A national committee on geographical names was established in 1972.

Preserving communication links with United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) and the Arabic division, Libya has organized in December 2004 in Tripoli the Second Arab Conference on Geographical Names, and has attended most UNGEGN conferences and meetings. Modified Beirut System has been used in maps published after the establishment of Survey Of Libya.

Libya has recorded, since Vienna meeting various activities in the field of geographical names among these activities are:

- The condensed participation in the geographical names conference organized in Tunis in April 2007 by African Organization of Cartography and Remote Sensing and Regional Center of Remote Sensing for North African States, and the participation in the toponymy training course organized during the conference under supervision of UNGEGN.
- Beirut modified system has been used by Survey Of Libya in production of new small scale maps of Libya (1 Million and ½ Million) covering all country.
- Survey Of Libya is preparing geographical names data base
- Graduate programs in geographical names in Libyan Universities are encouraged by Survey Of Libya

Morocco

The Moroccan kingdom assumes special interests for the geographical names through several governmental Agencies. “Agence National de la Conservation Fonciere du Cadastre et de Cartographic (ANCFCC)”, in its capacity as the official organ for planning and producing base maps of the kingdom, is the main interested organ in the field of standardization of geographical names. A department dealing with geographical names has been established within ANCFCC that takes care of:

- Standardization of geographical names and making sure they are correctly written on base, compiled and thematic maps, also on urban charts produced during years 2004 – 2007.
- Updating data base for standardization and romanization of geographical names in both Arabic and Latin.

Morocco has participated, since Vienna meeting, in various events. The followings are some of them:

- Tunis conference in geographical names in April 2007
- Toponymy training course held in Tunis in April 2007
- Beirut third Arabic Conference for standardization of geographical names held in May 2007.

It is to be mentioned at the end of this report that the Arabic Division of UNGEGN has taken decisions concerning organizing the forth Arabic conference on geographical names in Beirut in 2009.

The division wishes to continue organizing and participation in training courses and scientific symposiums like Tunis conference which was organized in by AOCRS and RCRSNAS in April 2007, and hopes to improve its future activities with cooperation with UNCEGN.

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