

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

New York, 21 - 30 August 2007

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  
Eighth Conference**

**A concise thematic synthesis of the information contained in the country  
reports submitted to the Ninth Conference**

Submitted on behalf of UNGEGN \*\*

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\* E/CONF.98/1.

\*\* Prepared by Paul Woodman, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

## **A concise thematic synthesis of the information contained in the country reports submitted to the Ninth Conference<sup>1</sup>**

### **Introduction**

This thematic synthesis of the country reports submitted to the Ninth Conference has for the most part been collated from the summaries of those country reports submitted under agenda item 4: *Reports by Governments on the situation in their countries and on the progress made in the standardization of geographical names since the Eighth Conference*. Accordingly, countries that did not supply a country report, or supplied a country report without a summary, may find that their information is not included here. Accounts of general standardization activities, of the establishment of national names authorities, and of work on Toponymic Guidelines have not been included in this synthesis.

It is apparent that the concept of the country report has been viewed in different ways by different countries:

1. either as an extended summary of a country's entire activities, with greater details on each single activity to be found in other more detailed WPs & CRPs under other agenda items;
2. or as a means of supplying one single paper outlining the sum of a country's activities, with no further WPs or CRPs submitted.

It is also the case that some countries have not submitted a country report at all, preferring instead to separate out all their information into one or more WP or CRP under different and more specific agenda items (eg the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Mongolia, Norway, Qatar, South Africa and Uzbekistan). Frequently, agenda item 9 *National Standardization* in particular has been chosen to convey information that might equally have been covered in a country report. This is quite understandable, since there is certainly a very close correlation between country reports and national standardization, and together they represent perhaps the two crucial core items of the agenda.

A list of the documents consulted in the writing of this paper can be seen in the Annex.

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### **Cultural Heritage**

Many country reports consider the significance of cultural heritage and the association of toponymy with the land, among them those of Belarus, Burkina Faso, Canada, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Sweden. Additionally, the Islamic Republic of Iran reports on programmes to gather the history of names, including the establishment of a historical names working group.

### **National Names Authorities**

The essential role played by such authorities in many countries is a very commonly noted theme, seen in the reports of eg Austria, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Lithuania, the Russian Federation, Sweden, Turkey and the United States.

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<sup>1</sup> Prepared by Paul Woodman, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

### **Legislative Considerations**

The manner in which legislation and legal frameworks have been used to promote toponymic standardization is seen in the reports of Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Russian Federation, Spain and Sweden. Denmark and Italy note how legal structures might be of benefit to them. The Russian Federation further reports that legal responsibility for toponymic affairs has been moved to the Ministry of Transport. In Turkey a new toponymic board has been established under the Ministry of the Interior.

### **Minority Names, Indigenous Names & Multi-Lingual Areas**

Ireland and the United Kingdom are among the countries whose reports highlight significant developments regarding the status and spelling of minority names. The country reports of Belgium, Burkina Faso, Finland, Hungary, the Netherlands and Sweden are among those which deal with toponymy in multi-lingual areas. The reports of Australia, Canada and the United States note work on indigenous toponymy.

### **Toponymy at the Sub-National Level**

Several countries with federal, autonomous or devolved administrative structures possess toponymic bodies which operate at the sub-national level, as witnessed by the reports of *eg* Austria, Canada and Spain.

### **Relationship of Toponymic Activities to Mapping Programmes**

This is an important and commonly discussed theme, evident in the country reports of *eg* Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and Sweden.

### **Toponymic Databases & Gazetteers**

There is as always a vast amount of work being undertaken on this topic throughout the world. Among the highlights in the country report summaries are:

- Belarus: constructing a national catalogue of names and a toponymic database; publishing gazetteers of settlements by administrative division
- Belgium: work on a toponymic gazetteer and database
- Denmark: work on a new and improved Greenland gazetteer, to be published on the internet
- Finland: toponymic input for the topographic database; development of the geographical names register
- Germany: work on a toponymic database, destined as part of the national spatial data infrastructure
- Islamic Republic of Iran: creation of a database with its website
- Ireland: publication of a national gazetteer; also a new web-based national toponymic database
- Israel: development of a trilingual database
- Japan: revision of the Gazetteer of Japan, keyed to 1:1million scale
- Republic of Korea: work towards a national gazetteer
- Latvia: development of the geographical names database; compilation of national and local gazetteers and geographical name dictionaries
- Lebanon: preparation of a bi-scriptual gazetteer (paper & electronic versions) for the names of villages and cities
- Russian Federation: development of a huge database, eventually to be web-based, with all features at 1:100,000 scale to be included by 2010

- Spain: agreement on a national toponymic data model ensuring inter-operability between differing data sets; completion of a concise national gazetteer; work on a national gazetteer based on the toponymic database keyed to 1:25,000 scale
- Vietnam: development of a concise gazetteer of administrative unit names as part of the national gazetteer; work on a toponymic information system for a national spatial database

### **Internet Domain Names**

The country report of Australia includes information on the protection of geographical names in the domain name environment with the release of a new set of second-level domain names.

### **Commemorative Naming**

The country reports of Finland and Jamaica include information on this subject.

### **Glossary & Terminology Activities**

Activities under this heading feature in the country reports of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Italy.

### **Writing Systems**

Several countries report significant activities in this sphere. Mostly these involve romanization, regarding either progress made towards the national adoption an official system (Belarus; Ukraine) or a desire to modify an existing UN-adopted system (Islamic Republic of Iran for Persian; Israel for Hebrew; Lebanon and other countries for Arabic). But there are also developments which do not involve romanization. Belarus is turning its Belarusian names into parallel Russian versions, and Israel is implementing Hebrew-Arabic and Arabic-Hebrew rules, while the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya is developing Roman-script versions of geographical designations to help ensure consistency in the application of designations on official maps.

### **Maritime Names**

There seems to be a growing interest in this topic, with significant information provided in the country reports of Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, the Republic of Korea, New Zealand and the United States. There is now a dedicated Committee on Marine Geographical Names in the Republic of Korea.

### **Antarctic Names**

This topic is discussed in the country reports of Japan, New Zealand and the United States.

### **Foreign Names, Country Names & Exonyms**

The United States reports on its foreign names activities, including a significant enhancement of its Geographic Names Data Base. Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, the Russian Federation and Ukraine have all produced atlases, gazetteers, or encyclopaedias of the world or parts thereof. The country report of Spain is among the few that mentions work on a list of country names. Relatively few country report summaries mention work on exonyms; among those that do are the reports of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Spain and Ukraine.

### **Regional Approaches to Toponymy**

A recognition that some issues might best be tackled on a regional rather than a purely national basis is evident in the country reports of Australia (which has a Committee for Geographical Names in Australasia, established with New Zealand), Croatia and Germany; the last in particular with reference to the EuroGeoNames project (*qv*).

### **EuroGeoNames Project**

The country reports of Germany, Latvia and the Netherlands highlight the contributions of their countries to this project.

### **International Co-operation**

There have of course been many meetings of Divisions and Working Groups. In addition, mention of specific instances of international co-operation is made in several country reports, *eg* those of Brazil, Canada, Croatia, the Netherlands and the United States.

### **Toponymic Education & Practice**

The ongoing importance of this topic is stressed in the country reports of Australia, Brazil, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United States.

### **Calls for Assistance**

Vietnam notes its inexperience in toponymy and that it would very much appreciate support from other countries in toponymic training and in the creation of its toponymic database (*qv*).

### **Disaster Relief & Aid Activities**

The problems encountered when a non-standardized toponymy exists, hampering relief and aid efforts, were well illustrated by a UN presentation at the 23<sup>rd</sup> UNGEGN in 2006, and are now noted in the country report of Burkina Faso.

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### **Annex: List of submitted documents consulted for this paper**

E/CONF.98/7	Israel
E/CONF.98/12	Russian Federation
E/CONF.98/17	Netherlands
E/CONF.98/21	Australia
E/CONF.98/23	Islamic Republic of Iran
E/CONF.98/29	Turkey
E/CONF.98/37	Austria
E/CONF.98/43	Italy
E/CONF.98/45	Japan
E/CONF.98/48	United Kingdom
E/CONF.98/56	Sweden
E/CONF.98/67	Indonesia
E/CONF.98/88	Hungary
E/CONF.98/90	Lithuania
E/CONF.98/91	Germany
E/CONF.98/95	Croatia
E/CONF.98/96	Brazil
E/CONF.98/101	Canada
E/CONF.98/118	Jamaica
E/CONF.98/119	Belarus
E/CONF.98/128	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya
E/CONF.98/132	Finland

E/CONF.98/134	Latvia
E/CONF.98/CRP.1	Estonia
E/CONF.98/CRP.6	Belgium
E/CONF.98/CRP.8	United States
E/CONF.98/CRP.10	Spain
E/CONF.98/CRP.17	New Zealand
E/CONF.98/CRP.24	Ukraine
E/CONF.98/CRP.27	Sri Lanka
E/CONF.98/CRP.28	Brunei Darussalam
E/CONF.98/CRP.31	Lebanon
E/CONF.98/CRP.35	Denmark
E/CONF.98/CRP.41	Republic of Korea
E/CONF.98/CRP.50	Ireland
E/CONF.98/CRP.56	Czech Republic
E/CONF.98/CRP.61	Republic of Korea
E/CONF.98/CRP.63	Vietnam
E/CONF.98/CRP.65	Burkina Faso