

**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**

Report of Cameroon

Submitted by Cameroon **

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** Prepared by Michel Simeu Kamdem, Director, Geographical Research Division, National Institute of Cartography, Yaounde, Cameroon.

REPORT OF CAMEROUN

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Background

In Cameroon, a law created early in 1968, a National Commission on Toponymy. In so doing, Cameroon was among the first African countries to possess a national geographical names authority. But since then, the structure has never been operational. Many scholars even doubted that such an authority exists. This was not due to the lack of toponymic problem. The National Institute of Cartography (NIC) has been trying as possible to solve at its level, those facing mapping production.

The standardization of Geographical Names is a great challenge in Cameroon for several reasons:

- Historical reasons: Cameroon belongs to a bilingual system (French and English) due to historical heritage. This makes in such that *ou* for instance in francophone part of the country becomes *u* in the Anglophone part. Some examples: Kupe, Bakundu, Kumba, Muyuka... The differences are also notable in other specific English pronunciation.
- Cultural reasons: Cameroon hosts more than two hundred ethnic groups. The way each of them pronounces its geographical names does not automatically correspond with the official spelling. Some examples: *Pa djo* was written Bandjoun, *Ewondo* – Yaounde, *Tsan* – Dschang...
- The quality of newly created names can also be criticized. Some streets bear the name of non relevant facts. For instance: *acacia street* on a street without an ant tree.

* Prepared by Michel SIMEU KAMDEM Director, Geographical Research Division (National Institute of Cartography Yaounde Cameroon)

Activities in 2007

During the year 2007, Cameroon participated in the training workshop on toponymy in Tunis. The workshop was carried out by expert of the UNGEGN. Organised by AOCRS (African Organisation of Cartography and Remote Sensing) and the CRTEAN (North African Regional Centre for Remote Sensing), courses were given on functions, advantages, creation process, terminology and methodology of collecting geographical names. There were also given regional examples (Canada, Lebanon, North Africa). This workshop showed the necessity to :

- The standardization being at national or regional level,
- The romanisation process,
- The use of adequate names based on geography, history, sociology, linguistic, etc.

From this workshop, two main recommendations were interesting for Cameroon :

- the creation of a National Geographical Names Authority chargée de conseiller le gouvernement en matière de création et de mise à jour des noms de lieux (de milliers de lacs, monts, places, etc. n'ont pas de nom au Cameroun),
- the constitution of a national toponymic gazetteer.

After this workshop, we made a proposal of a new and outdated law which is now been studied at a political level.

After the promulgation of this text that we will lunch groundwork on the collection and the standardization of geographical names which final result will be a geographical dictionary of Cameroon. The National Institute of Cartography already possesses the dictionary of villages. Although all the villages are not yet listed, it is an important part of the projected geographical dictionary of Cameroon.

The next step which falls within the framework of the National Toponymic Commission will probably be a series of proposal of names to places which have no names in major towns like lakes, cross roads, etc.

In the perspective of the 9th United Nations Conference on the Standardization of geographical names, I have contacted six central Africa countries namely Burundi, Chad, democratic Republic of Congo, Central Africa Republic, Congo and Gabon. Exception made to DRC whose message was returned to me and could not reach the target, only Burundi responded and answer to the few questions that were asked on toponymy and standardization in their country, notably :

- Is there any national authority on toponymy in your country?
- If yes: since how long? What is its competence? What is its power? Under what ministry does it fall?
- Would you agree to take part in a joint project on the standardization of geographical names so as to improve the situation in Central Africa region?

In Burundi there is a unit which deals with the standardization of all geographical data since 2004. The coordination of this unit is made by OCHA-Burundi and members are all users and producers of geographical information and GIS specialists.

Future actions

In the absence of information on the others Central Africa countries, what will be first done will be to establish communication with them. From that communication, we will know whether they have a national board of geographical names or not. And thereafter, we will try to organize a training course on the methodology of collecting geographical names and to store them.