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**Meetings and Conferences: National names meetings,
conferences and symposiums**

Conferences in Brazil and Portugal agree on the need to create the Portuguese language division at UNGEGN

Submitted by Brazil **

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National Conference on Geography and Cartography

From August 21st to 25th 2006, at Rio de Janeiro, IBGE held the IV National Conference on Geography and Cartography (IV Conferência Nacional de Geografia e Cartografia – CONFEGE), together with the V National Conference on Statistics (V Conferência Nacional de Estatística – CONFEST). More than a thousand people and organizations attended both conferences and participated in broad debate over the future of the surveys on Statistics and Geosciences in the next ten years in Brazil. According to the Law 5.878 dated My 11th 1973, IBGE has its basic goal the production of information and research of various nature – statistical, geographical, cartographic e demographic – needed to build the knowledge about the country’s reality and also useful on the planning of public policies. To attain this goal, IBGE must act in various areas, among which, according to article 3, item III, “surveys, statistical analysis and studies, as well as demographic, geographic, geodetic and cartographic”, and item IV, “geodetic and topographic research, mapping and other cartographic activities”. The same law also regulates the General Plan of Statistical and Geographic Information (*Plano Geral de Informações Estatísticas e Geográficas* – PGIEG) as the tool to guide and coordinate activities regarding the production of information directed to the fulfilling of the mentioned objective.

Round-table on the Brazil Geographical Names Data Base

Among the events and invited experts proposed by the Coordination of Cartography of the Directorate of Geosciences of IBGE for the IV CONFEGE, there was the round-table on the Brazil Geographical Names Data Base (Banco de Nomes Geográficos do Brasil), which had two coordinators of IBGE and three experts from other institutions, among which one expert on geographical names from the South African Division of UNGEGN, who was officially invited by IBGE to be one of the international conference speakers. **Luís Abrahamo** works for the State Administration Ministry of Mozambique and is an active member of UNGEGN. His presentation showed the present situation of standardization in Mozambique and the activities of the country in the international conferences and events. Mozambique is one of the eight Portuguese-speaking countries of the world and is presently working on the creation of the national committee for geographical names.

At CONFEGE, the round-table about the recently created Brazil Geographical Names Data Base attracted a large audience (beyond 60 people), showing that there is broad interest in the debate on the different aspects – either geocartographic or linguistical – involved in national and international standardization of geographical names. One of the round-table coordinators started the presentation with a general explanation of the importance of the debate around the international proposals for toponymic standardization and of the need to gather information about the toponyms, which are presently recognized as important components of a country’s data infrastructure. After the presentation of the coordinator on the geocartographic aspects of the database related with standardization, the round-table focused historical and cultural aspects linked with the toponymic studies presently being conducted in a few Brazilian universities and research centers.

Round-table speakers

Maria Vicentina de Paula do Amaral Dick was of the speakers. As the most experimented teacher of Brazilian and indigenous Toponymy at the University of São Paulo, she presented some fundamental aspects of the linguistic studies related to Toponymy that can be useful in

the design of the database planned at IBGE. She is an expert in Toponymy and has been teaching the subject for more than 30 years at the same university where she got her doctor degree with a thesis in which she proposes to analyse toponyms in their cultural context according to the reason of the naming (toponymy motivation). The Brazilian database on geographical names includes toponymy motivation as a characteristic under analysis because it allows the understanding of toponymy beyond the language barriers, therefore allowing regional studies on culture and ethnolinguistics. Dr. Dick is using the toponymic motivation in spatial analysis of her own state and coordinates the Toponymic Atlas of Brazil (Atlas Toponímico do Brasil), a national research project on the theme to be conducted by a network that will involve many other national universities in the different states of Brazil, starting with Mato Grosso do Sul and Minas Gerais. The national project of the Toponymic Atlas is currently a research group at the Brazilian Council for Scientific Research (CNPq).

Mauro de Salles Villar is the director of Instituto Antonio Houaiss and editor of the *Dicionário Houaiss da Língua Portuguesa* (*Houaiss Dictionary of the Portuguese Language*). He presented another angle of the debate and exposed the many problems faced by reference books and dictionary publishers and editors as a consequence of the lack of consensus among national authorities presumably responsible for the language aspects of toponyms (Brazilian Academy of Letters – Academia Brasileira de Letras) and its cartographic aspects (IBGE).

CONFEGE's round-table on the Geographical Names Data Base included the presentation of Luís Abrahamo, president of the South African Division of UNGEGN. The representative of Mozambique before the UN Conference on Geographical Names congratulated Brazilian representatives for the initiative of suggesting the creation of the Portuguese Language Division at UNGEGN and declared the intention of his country to support the proposal as a way to strengthen national and international standardization of geographical names regarding the Portuguese speaking countries. He added that Angola informally declared the country's intention to support for the initiative when participating in the UN Conference on Standardization of Geographical Names. Brazil, Mozambique and Angola are directing efforts towards the standardization of geographical names because they consider it a necessary step in building efficiency of the Geospatial Data Infra-Structure.

Towards a Portuguese Language Division of UNGEGN

The Portuguese language countries are about to implement changes in spelling of some words in order to assure more uniformity to the use of the language in the different countries. The agreement was long debated between Brazil and Portugal and in the beginning of the 1990s it was approved by the Congress of both countries. As soon as the other six countries formally approve the agreement, it will come into force in all eight countries – this is expected to happen in a year or so. The changes agreed upon are not many but will certainly have a strong impact on the toponymy standardization yet envisioned, because it involves changes in spelling that will affect both generics and specific terms. Since most of the Portuguese speaking countries are still struggling for national standardization, their unity around toponymic concerns would be most useful not only for toponym use but also for the standardization of the language. Therefore, the immediate creation of a Portuguese Language Division of UNGEGN may play an important role in the implementation of the agreement itself, with benefits to all countries and to the UNCSGN goals.

As previously shown, at least two countries presently active at UNGEGN – Mozambique and

Brazil – are able to lead the movement for the creation of a Portuguese Division and formally represent it before the United Nations offices. It is also reasonable to expect Angola and Portugal to support the idea, even if they are not able to participate in the IX Conference. The other countries still have to be contacted but it will certainly be easier for them to adhere to standardization goals if documents in Portuguese are available, as it is envisioned when the division is created. During the last two years, in a mission supported by the United Nations, representatives of IBGE-Brazil have been acting as consultants for census operations in Guine-Bissau. Although geographical names have not yet been the direct object of the contacts, one can expect developments towards growing standardization concerns in that African country too.

First Conference on Portuguese Translation

In September 2006, representatives of IBGE presented two articles to be published in Portugal after the First Conference on Portuguese Translation (Primeira Conferência de Tradução Portuguesa – CONTRAPOR2006), held at Caparica, Portugal. Before an audience of more than 20 people, most of which translators of Portuguese nationality, the two works presented by Brazil suggested the creation of the Portuguese Language Division at UNGEGN as a way to strengthen the national and international efforts directed towards the fulfilling of the United Nations resolutions, signed by all the countries that participate in that forum. The public at CONTRAPOR congratulated the Brazilian authors for the initiative that promises to bring strength to the whole Portuguese Language community worldwide. There were some translators that declared that the initiative deserves to be supported by Portuguese authorities, among which Hermínio Duarte-Ramos, president of the program committee of the Universidade Nova de Lisboa (at Caparica, Portugal) and representative of the Faculdade de Ciências e Tecnologia, one of the institutions that promoted the conference.

References of the articles presentes are the following and there were plans to also publish them in a Portuguese magazine:

BUSTAMANTE, Ana Maria G.; MATHIAS, Márcia; ABI-SÂMARA, Raquel. “Glossário de termos para a padronização de nomes geográficos.” A tradução especializada: Um Motor de Desenvolvimento. Anais da I Conferência de Tradução Portuguesa, 11 e 12 de setembro de 2006, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Caparica. Associação de Tradução de Língua Portuguesa, Portugal, 2006 (pages 77-86).

BUSTAMANTE, Ana Maria G.; MATHIAS, Márcia; ABI-SÂMARA, Raquel. “Dicionário multilíngüe de nomes de países, exônimos e gentílicos.” A tradução especializada: Um Motor de Desenvolvimento. Anais da I Conferência de Tradução Portuguesa, 11 e 12 de setembro de 2006, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Caparica. Associação de Tradução de Língua Portuguesa, Portugal, 2006 (pages 67-76).

IBGE participation in other conferences

It also deserves to be mentioned the participation, in 2005, of the Coordination of Cartography of IBGE in the I Portuguese-Brazilian Symposium on Historical Cartography, held in Rio de Janeiro from September 12th to 15th by the Marine Directory of Historical and Cultural Heritage, in partnership with the Army Historical Archives, the Brazilian Cartography Society and the Marine Hydrographic Center. The Portuguese Sea Project (Projeto Mar Português), which was presented by a team from IBGE, raise immediate interest

from the representatives of the Brazilian Marine towards a possible partnership to use the structure already created for the Geographical Names Data Base in order to promote standardization of undersea and coast toponymy collected by the Marine and other institutions. The Portuguese Sea Project itself intends to shed light over historical toponyms of Portuguese language spread in almost every part of the world by the Portuguese sailors. It is known that, during the XV and XVI centuries, Portuguese sailors visited and gave names to places as they visited them and presented them to the European people. In Africa, América and Asia, the Portuguese sailors and cartographers gave names to places in maps they produced, and some of these names still survive, while others were transformed as they were used by speakers of other languages.

Specially for this reason, although there may be others, the non-regular participation of the Portuguese speaking countries in the recent UN Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names should not weaken the determination and the need to create the Portuguese Language Division at UNGEGN. Its creation will, on the other side, give incentive to research on the Portuguese toponymy worldwide, even in countries that did not keep the Portuguese as a local language. Therefore, the results of research done on this theme will certainly be useful to other countries that have places located on the historical Portuguese routes.

In 2007, from the eight countries that have Portuguese as the most spoken language, more than three showed interest in participating in the international debate on toponymy and in promoting the national standardization according to the international standards of their common language. Mozambique has negotiated internally the terms of the law and is proposing the approval of the creation of the National Committee for Geographical Names. In Angola, a group of representatives from three governmental agencies is working on the approval of each of the names of the country's official administrative divisions. Following a long debate, the government decided to keep the spelling of the name of the country, Angola, where the Portuguese is recognized as the national unity language.

Support for a new UNGEGN Division

The creation of the Portuguese Language Division at UNGEGN may have the power to strengthen the United Nations initiatives in national and international standardization since it contributes to the dissemination of the relevant discussions promoted in that forum in more countries. Among other advantages, the Portuguese language Division will allow the uniform dissemination of basic concepts among Portuguese speaking countries, since it may include common efforts towards the translation of important sources of information produced in the United Nations such as the *Glossary of Terms for the Standardization of Geographical Names*, only available in the six official UN languages, and the *Manual for the Standardization of Geographical Names*, which by June 2007, had only been published in English.