

## **The Arab Division for Experts on Geographical Names**

### **Future Meetings:**

1. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Conference on Survey and Geographical Names will be held at the mid of 2015.
2. Workshop entitled: "The Judiazation process of geographical names in Palestine and ways of confronting these acts" will be organized at the mid of 2015.
3. Workshop entitled "Geographical Names as a cultural heritage" will be held in Dec. 2015.

Permanent Headquarter: The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan – Amman

### **Overview:**

The Arab Division of Experts on Geographical Names composed of Arab Experts in Geographical Names assigned by their countries to collect, check, unify and process names of places and landmarks in all Arab countries, and it is part of (UNGEGN) affiliated to the Economic and Social Counsel (ECOSOC) which established the World Group of Experts on Geographical Names 1965, which organized 10 conferences and 28 courses tell now.

### **Meeting of the Arab Division of Experts on Geographical Names:**

In Aug. 1971, a Conference for the Arab Division of Experts on Geographical Names was held in Beirut in which the Arab Group was formed under the name of "Arab Experts Group for Standardization the Names of Geographical Sites in Arab Countries".

This meeting was held upon an invitation from the League of Arab Countries and organized by the Ministry of Culture in Lebanon, which was attended by Sixteen Arab countries. It was decided in this meeting to use a standard Arab System for transferring the geographical names

from the Arab letters to Latin letters. This system was presented to the Social Economic Counsel in the United Nations to be approved and circulated to all concerned international organizations to be used as the only system in the world.

Accordingly, the United Nations issued in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Conference of World Experts for standardization Geographical Names held in London on 1972, issued its resolution and amendments called " Beirut Amended Paper".

Arab Countries faced difficulties in the application of (Beirut Amended System), then the United Nations recommended in the 7<sup>th</sup> Conference held in New York 1998, that the League of Arab countries should hold a meeting for the experts to overcome difficulties and offer solutions to the United Nations.

**1) The 1<sup>st</sup> Arab Conference on Geographical Names:**

Following the recommendations of the Arab Division in the United Nations Experts Team of Standardization of Geographical Names, and upon an invitation from the Survey Department in Libya, and confirmation that the standardized and exact use of geographical names is considered one of the basic elements in active communication on Arab and international levels supporting the social and economic development, the 1<sup>st</sup> Arab Conference on Geographical Names was held in Tripoli/Libya during the period 18-20, Aug., 2004.

This Conference aimed to standardization the system and techniques of writing geographical names in Arab World in produced maps, atlases and geographical names lists, in order to reach a correct dealing of geographical names in all kinds of media on international and Arab levels. This conference was attended by delegations of the following Arab countries: Libya, Morocco, Tunis, United Arab Emirates, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Sudan and Algeria.

**2) The 2<sup>nd</sup> Arab Conference on Geographical Names:**

During Vienna Conference held in April 2006, the Lebanese representative in the Arab Division, called to hold the 2<sup>nd</sup> Conference in

Beirut 2006, in which all participants agreed on the final "Romanization" System depends on alphabet for transforming the letters from Arabic to Latin and applied roles for this alphabet that take into consideration the Arabic grammar and world recommendations for transferring geographical names, and thus find solutions for all problems encountered transferring Arabic names in all local dialects of member countries in Arab Division.

The Arab Division met on the sidelines of the formative session in the field of geographical names organized by the African Maps and Remote Sensing Organization in Tunis in 4/4/2007 in the presence of representatives of the following countries: United Arab Emirates, Tunis, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Lebanon, Libya and Morocco.

### **3) The 3<sup>rd</sup> Arab Conference on Geographical Names:**

The Arab Division, Heads of Geographical Institutes, Heads and Experts of Geographical Names held the 3<sup>rd</sup> Arab Conference on Geographical Names during the period 30-31 May, 2007 upon an invitation from the Lebanese Army Leadership- Department of Geographical Affairs.

The delegations of the following Arab countries attended the Conference: Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Oman, Morocco, Algeria, Palestine and Qatar, in which many subjects were discussed such as: the Division organization, the meetings schedule and election of General Board, seven working committees and work teams.

During the 9<sup>th</sup> Conference on Standardization Geographical Names held in the United Nations Building in New York on 2007, the participated Arab delegations decided to assign the representative of Lebanon (the Head of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Conference on Standardization Geographical Names) for the preparation of the 4<sup>th</sup> Conference on Standardization Geographical Names during 2008.

#### **Aims of the Conference:**

The Conference aimed to discuss difficulties caused by the application of Standardized Arab System and conducting suitable amendments in order to:

1. Overcome difficulties encountered foundations in the field of geographical names in some Arab countries.
2. Solve problems caused by pronunciation of some Arabic letters in different way from its original one in some Arab countries.
3. Pronounce some Arab names in local dialect used in some Arab countries by different ethnicities.
4. Make the necessary adjustments on the system and to be approved in its final version.

Also the Conference aimed to activate the joint Arab work in the following fields:

- a. Standardization of Arab Geographical Names.
- b. Building the Standardized Arab Dictionary of Arab Geographical Names.
- c. Maintaining the Arab Geographical Names as an unalterable and non-fading Arab Cultural legacy.
- d. Organizing education workshops and experience exchange in the field of geographical names and information.
- e. Implementation of Arab and International resolutions related to collecting, adjusting and standardizing geographical names.

#### **4) The 4<sup>th</sup> Conference: Towards a Standardized Arab Atlas.**

Upon an invitation from the Arab Center for Legal and Judicial Researches affiliated to the Arab League, the Arab Division of Experts on Geographical Names and the Lebanese Army Leadership- Department of Geographical Affairs, Heads of Geographical institutions and Geographical names and experts, held the 4<sup>th</sup> Arab Conference on Geographical Names 2008 in Beirut.

### **This Conference aimed to the following:**

1. Discussing the standardized Arab System and the development of writing geographical names in Arab countries.
2. The effect of Arab dialects and pronouncing geographical names in Roman letters on this system (searching in exotic names from western languages).
3. Showing the activities of the Arab countries in the field of standardization of geographical names, developing idioms and processing its writing, and laying down a mechanism for building the standardized Arab dictionaries (paper & electronic), based on data bases and Geographic Information System (GIS).
4. Studying establishing automatic program for transforming geographical names from Arabic letters to Latin in order to establish the Standardized Arab Atlas for writing geographical names on maps by modern methods.

the Conference also discussed ways of Arab cooperation in fields of standardization geographical names, application of Beirut System, Arab and international resolutions in the field of geographical names, developing the web site of the Arab Division ([www.adgn.org](http://www.adgn.org)), and choosing a permanent headquarter for the Arab Division in the League of Arab Countries building in Beirut.

At the final session headed by his Excellency Ambassador Abdel Rahman Alsolh, representative of the General Secretary of the League of Arab Countries, the Conference issued the following recommendations included the League of Arab Countries, General Secretariat of ESCWA, and the Arab Governments:

#### **1- The League of Arab Countries:**

- Circulating the standardized Arab System for transforming geographical names to all member states and urged them to apply this system in writing geographical names in Latin letters on maps, and submit notices – if there is any- to the General Secretariat of the League of Arab Countries within 6 months of receiving the system.

- Addressing a letter to Economic and Social Council of United Nations included the recommendations of the 4<sup>th</sup> Arab Conference on Geographical Names, and asking that this system should be adopted by all relevant international organizations.
- Paying needed attention to the standardization of geographical names by all Arab countries and urged them to work on within the elected Arab Commission and its committees, in order to issue the Standardized Arab Dictionary on Geographical Names.
- Assuring the membership of all Arab countries in the Division.
- Working on issuing the approval of choosing the headquarter of the League of Arab Countries in Beirut to be the permanent site of the Division.

## **2- General Secretariat of ESCWA:**

- Submitting the final report of the 4<sup>th</sup> Conference to the General Secretariat of UNESCO to be referred to the UN group of Experts on Geographical Names.
- Suggesting suitable mechanisms for cooperation and coordination with the Governing Board of the Arab Division of Experts on Geographical Names.
- Coordinating with Governing Board of the Arab Division regarding conferences and sessions held by its committees.

## **3- Arab Governments:**

- Adopting the system issued by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Arab Conference of Geographical Names held in Beirut 2007, to be used as a standardized system in all Arab countries to transfer geographical names from Arab to Latin.
- Sending all notes about this system – if existed- to the General Secretariat of the League of Arab Countries- ESCWA.
- Issuing new dictionaries, maps and atlases, and updating old ones according to the rules of the new system.
- Circulating this system on schools, universities, public and private institutions.

- Establishing a permanent national commission for geographical names in every country specialized in collecting, standardizing, preserving and using geographical names aiming to be a standard reference.
- Collecting geographical names in lists to be submitted to the cultural department in the League of Arab Countries.

#### **5) The 5<sup>th</sup> Arab Conference:**

The 5<sup>th</sup> Arab Conference of Experts on Geographical Names was held in Beirut during the period 26-29 May 2010 upon an invitation from the League of Arab Countries sent by Diplomatic ways to all Arab countries.

Representative of 15 Arab countries attended this Conference (Egypt, Sudan, Lebanon, Syria, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Morocco, Tunis, Libya, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Palestine, Oman and Jordan) in addition to two representatives of the League of Arab Countries (Ambassador Abdel Rahman Alsolh and Mr. Moh'd Al Khatib).

#### **Themes of the Conference:**

- Application of a Standardized Arab System.
- Establishing a national commission for geographical names in every country.
- Adopting standardized roles for names in every country.
- Organizing tables of Arab Sites Names.
- Publishing names in dictionaries, atlases and maps.
- Writing names on banners of cities, towns, streets, and geographical places in general.
- Preserving the cultural heritage.
- Holding meetings of working groups of the Division.
- Electing a new Governing Board of the Arab Division.

## **6) The 6<sup>th</sup> Arab Conference on Geographical Names:**

This Conference was held in Amman during the period 10-13 July, 2012. Delegations of 11 countries attended this Conference: Jordan, United Arab Emirates, Tunis, Algeria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Lebanon and Libya.

### **Recommendations:**

- The Conference recommended the working committees of the Division to pay great attention to the themes of the Division and working on holding annual meetings for discussing subjects and duties of the Division.
- Regarding to the actions committed by the Zionist Entity so far of Judiazation, changing and removing Arab names on the land of occupied Palestine and other occupied regions, and aiming to preserve the Arab cultural historical heritage which exposed to the worst removals and effacement works by the Zionist entity, and this conference believe that these acts are contrary to international law and resolutions issued by the conferences of UNGEGN related with preserving the names of places from changing, distortion or translation. The Conference urged the General Secretariat of the League of Arab Countries to work on forming a special committee of Arab experts in coordination with Arab governments and related authorities.

### **The mission of this Committee will be:**

- Collecting old documents and maps.
- Documenting the Arab geographic names.
- Fixing the names that exposed to ongoing Zionist violations.
- Raising the Committee's findings to the League of Arab Countries which in turn deposited these findings in the international organizations to be registered as Arab cultural legacy.
- The Conference recommended the League of Arab Countries to offer needed support for this Committee to produce maps and dictionaries so these names can be circulated on



international and Arab levels provided that these names should be registered in Arabic and Latin letters.

- The Conference also recommended the Arab countries that have not yet established national bodies to expedite establishing the national permanent commission specialized in standardization geographical names for each country, and stressed on cooperation of Arab countries in this field.
- The member countries are recommended to organize data bases for Arab geographical names, and be deposited in committees of geographical names dictionaries and financing to be studied and standard processed.
- The optimal exploitation of technology in geographical names.
- Considering the importance of geographical names and their role in various aspects of life, the Arab countries are recommended to raise the awareness of the importance of geographical names in community.
- The application of the standardized Arab system in Romanization of geographical names, and follow up a continuous and safe application of this system (Beirut System 2007 and its amendments).
- The necessity of cooperation with the Arab Union of Surveying, institutions and organizations related with geographical names.
- Reactivating the website of the Arab Division and that all Arab experts should participate actively to enrich this website as it is considered an important way of communication between experts and the Division.
- The Conference also recommended the Arab experts to study the amendment offered by Jordan on the Arab Division System to be approved at the 1<sup>st</sup> session of the next conference.
- The representatives agreed to choose the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to be a permanent headquarter of the Arab Division and Jordan is the Chairman.

- It was decided to keep the committees formed at the 5<sup>th</sup> Conference provided to be restructured by the Governing Board.
- Conference findings and recommendations should be submitted to the League of Arab Countries by the Chairman of the Division.

### **7) The 7<sup>th</sup> Conference of Arab Experts on Geographical Names:**

This Conference was held in Amman/Jordan during the period 11-13/11/2014.

#### **Aims:**

The Conference aims to activate the joint Arab work in the following fields:

- Patterning the Arab Geographical Names.
- Building the Standardized Arab Dictionary on Arab Geographical Names.
- Preserving the Arab Geographical Names as an Arab Cultural Heritage that can't be changed or extinct.
- Organizing workshops and exchanging experts in the field of geographical information and names.
- Applying the Arab and International resolutions related with collecting, adjusting, patterning and preserving geographical names.

#### **Themes of the 7<sup>th</sup> Conference:**

- Naming and numbering in Arab countries.
- Activities of member countries in the field of Geographical Names.
- Geographical Names in cultural, historical and social heritage.
- Resisting the Judiazation of Geographical Names.
- Dictionaries on Geographical Names.
- Committees of Arab Division on Geographical Names.
- Awareness and education in the field of Geographical Names.
- Geographical Names and updated techniques.

Delegations of the following 13 countries attended this Conference: Jordan, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Tunis, Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Palestine, Lebanon and Libya.

**Important recommendations:**

- The Conference recommended the Arab countries that have not yet established national bodies to expedite establishing the national permanent commission specialized in standardization geographical names for each country, and stressed on cooperation of Arab countries in this field.
- Forming a special committee of Arab specialized Experts by the Arab Division of Experts on Geographical names aiming to preserve Arab geographical names against Judiazation, changing, distortion and removing and those recommendations should be submitted to UNGEGN. A workshop entitled: the Judiazation process of geographical names in Palestine and ways of confronting these acts, will be organized at the mid of next year 2015.
- Organizing databases for Arab geographical names to be deposited in committees of geographical names dictionaries and financing to be studied and standard processed, and the optimal exploitation of technology in geographical names.
- Holding annual meetings of working committees for discussing its missions and duties.
- Awareness of the importance of the geographical names especially for school and universities students through various media.
- Follow up the application of the standardized Arab system in Romanization of geographical names continuously and safely, and the League of Arab Countries should be informed.
- Enhancing the website of the Arab Division by active contribution.
- All Arab countries are recommended to adopt and apply the Arab Division System.

- Issuing a magazine for the Arab Division on the website includes activities of member countries, articles and scientific lectures of Arab experts.
- Electing the Governing Board as follows:
  - Dr. Eng. Awni Moh'd Kasawneh (Jordan) : Chairman
  - Dr. Abdullah Ben Naser Alwlaie' (Saudi Arabia): 1<sup>st</sup> Vice Chairman.
  - Naema Fraiha (Tunis) : 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Chairman.
  - Khalid Al Melhi (UAE) : 3<sup>rd</sup> Vice Chairman.
  - Eng. Maron Khraish: Commissioner of the Arab Division in the League of Arab Countries and regional & international organizations.
  - Ibrahim Al Jaber Obaid (Jordan) : Reporter
  - Yousef Ben Al Harith Al Nabhani (Oman) : Editor

### **Most important international resolutions issued by geographical names conferences on the United Nations level**

- Resolution No. 1/12: issued at the 1<sup>st</sup> Conference in Genève 1967.  
This Conference recommended the Arab countries desire to make official maps and writing Arabic names in Latin letters, to agree on a standardized system in all these countries or agree to use only two systems: The first system depends on the French system and the other one depends on English system.
- Resolution No. 11/8: issued at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Conference in London 1972.  
This Conference recommended adopting Beirut System which was prepared in the 1<sup>st</sup> Arab Conference of Experts on Geographical Names held in Beirut 1971 which was published in the document No. E/conf.61/L.77 in all countries adopted this System officially.
- Resolution No.111/9: issued in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Conference in Athens 1977.  
After viewing the efforts and findings of Beirut Conference held in Beirut on 1971 and the amendments to the

Standardized Arab System issued by this conference, and after taking into consideration the technical difficulties encountered the Arab countries during applying this System, the conference recommended the Arab Division to study Morocco proposal to reach for solutions and be submitted in the Meeting of Experts on geographical names at its 8<sup>th</sup> session.

- Resolution No. VIII/4: issued in the 7<sup>th</sup> Conference held in New York 1998.

After taking into consideration previous resolutions specially resolution No. 11/8 and 111/9 issued by the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> conferences and knowing that the Arab countries adopted in 1972 a standardized system for transforming Arab geographical names into Latin letters upon the recommendation of the Arab Experts Conference in Beirut 1971. And as the application of this system still faces some difficulties, the 7<sup>th</sup> Conference recommended the League of Arab Countries to follow up efforts through its bodies to hold a meeting specialized for discussing difficulties encountered applying the certified system in resolution 11/8 based on Beirut System 1971 and offer suitable solutions as soon as possible during the sessions of United Nations Experts on Geographical names.