

9 June 2017

Original: English

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

New York, 8-17 August 2017

Item 5 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 Tenth Conference
(for distribution only)**

National Report – Sri Lanka

Submitted by Sri Lanka **

* E/CONF.105/1

** Prepared by D.N.D. Hettiarachchi, Survey Department, Sri Lanka

Eleventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names New York, 8 to 17 August 2017, National Report – Sri Lanka

D.N.D. Hettiarachchi

Survey Department, No.150, Bernard Soyza Mawatha, Colombo 5, Sri Lanka

Email: hettiarachchidnd@gmail.com

1. Background Information

The Cabinet of Ministers of Government of Sri Lanka in principle approved appointment of a Committee for Standardization of Geographical Names (CSGN) in 2009. However, appointment of members for the CSGN was done in December 2014 with required institutional, administrative and financial arrangements. CSGN consists with 16 members representing officials of Survey Department, National Languages Department, Department of Archeology, Postal Department, Agrarian Services Department, Ministry of Home affairs, Ministry of Cultural affairs, Ministry of Lands, and experts in history, geography, ocean geography, Sinhala and Tamil languages. Surveyor General of Sri Lanka functions as chairperson of the CSGN. CSGN commenced its work in March 2015, and generally meets once a month at the Survey Department. Survey Department established a separate unit for the activities of standardization. Survey Department is also responsible for data collection and processing, coordination, accounting, management of resources and records, etc., in standardization related activities.

2. Goals and National Program

Our goal is introduction of a database of correct and specific geographical names associated with cultural heritage of Sri Lankan people through standardization to support national unity. National program mainly covers, defining of policies, principles and guidelines for standardization, collection of data from field and other data sources, data processing, verifying processed data with other authorized organizations, get external views such as views of normal public and other interested parties, and incorporate external views as applicable in standardization, publish standardized names for public use and introduction of required legislations if required. Introduction of Romanization of Sinhala is also in national program.

3. Problems, Solutions and Achievements During the Reporting Period

Standardization of Geographical Names was a learning and innovation task for the members of CSGN. Therefore, CSGN decided to select a pilot area, collect data and analyze outcomes. With the experience gained in pilot area, it was able to identify and establish a suitable methodology for rest of the country. Some areas in Sri Lanka are having multicultural and multilingual society. Therefore, CSGN decided to collect field data in homogeneous and systematic manner at local administrative area level. From March 2015 to April 2017, progress of filed data collection is 92%, and progress of standardization (stage-1) is 53%. CSGN believe that this progress is a good achievement since its inception in 2015.

The Sinhala and Tamil languages are both official and national languages in Sri Lanka, and both languages have non-Roman alphabets. Romanization system to be introduced for Sinhala language as Romanization system for Tamil language is available. CSGN already prepared Romanization system for Sinhala and submitted it to the Sri Lanka Standards Institute for their observations. Once their observation is available, it will be submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers for final approval.

4. Conclusion

Standardization of geographical names in Sri Lanka can be completed by end of 2018 as main sections of the data collection is now nearing completion. By analyzing the results of already completed area, it was revealed that

- a. about 30% of the geographical names, currently use by the public, are not recorded in any of the prevailing data sources including topographical maps, administrative reports, etc.
- b. about 20% of the geographical names, available in the prevailing data sources, are not in use, incorrect, having incorrect positions or having misspellings, etc.

These results emphasize the importance of standardization of geographical names and introduction of a database of standardized names for common use in Sri Lanka.