

Item 7 of the Provisional Agenda

SUMMARY REPORTS OF THE WORKING GROUPS

**Report by the Convenor of the Working
Group on Romanization Systems***

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REPORT BY THE CONVENOR OF THE WORKING GROUP ON ROMANIZATION SYSTEMS¹

The report covers the period since the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names held in Berlin in August-September 2002. The Working Group, as constituted at the 21st Session of UNGEGN held in conjunction with the Eighth Conference, with subsequent changes, is as follows:

Mr. Ass'ad S. Abdo (Saudi Arabia)
Mr. Brahim Atoui (Algeria)
Mrs. Caroline Burgess (United Kingdom)
Ms. Catherine Cheetham (United Kingdom)
Mr. Randall E. Flynn (United States)
Mr. Hari Shanker Gupta (India)
Mr. Charles M. Heyda (United States)
Mr. Naftali Kadmon (Israel)
Mr. Mehran Maghsoudi (Islamic Republic of Iran)
Mr. Peeter Päll (convenor, Estonia)
Mr. Gerd Quinting (United States)
Mr. Alessandro Toniolo (Italy)
Mr. Paul J. Woodman (United Kingdom)

The UNGEGN Working Group on Romanization Systems had a working meeting during the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN). The Working Group had a possibility to learn from experts present at the Conference new information regarding the status of romanization systems in Bhutan, Cambodia, India, Laos, Mongolia and Nepal. At the Conference two resolutions were adopted concerning romanization, No. 13 (Romanization of Thai geographical names), and No. 14 (Romanization of Serbian Cyrillic). Experts at the Conference and at the 21st Session of UNGEGN were informed of the decision by the Arabic Division experts of UNGEGN to finalise proposed modifications to the UN recommended romanization system.

Following the 8th UNCSGN, the Report on the Current Status of United Nations Romanization Systems for Geographical Names was updated to reflect the newest available information and Version 2.2 (January, 2003) was published on the Working Group's website at <http://www.eki.ee/wgrs/> in February, 2003. Updated sections include Arabic, Khmer, Serbian, Thai, Burmese, Dzongkha and Korean. Updates are presented to the UNGEGN Session as a separate document.

The mentioned report was also submitted to the UNGEGN Secretariat for inclusion in the Technical Reference Manual for the Standardization of Geographical Names, being compiled according to Resolution VIII/15.

During the period after the 8th UNCSGN or immediately before it, but not reported previously, correspondence was held with and inquiries had been sent to national mapping authorities in Armenia, Bhutan, Cambodia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Georgia, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Maldives and Thailand. Replies have been received from Bhutan, Ethiopia, Georgia, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Thailand.

The following new information can be reported concerning languages/scripts on the agenda of the Working Group.

I. Languages/scripts covered by systems recommended by the United Nations

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AMHARIC

The Ethiopian Mapping Authority confirmed in an e-mail of 25 February, 2004 that the romanization system used at present in Ethiopia is still the same that was approved by the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in 1967 (resolution I/17).

ARABIC

At the 8th UNCSGN (2002), the Arabic Division of the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names announced that it had finalised proposed modifications to the UN recommended romanization system. These proposals would be submitted to the League of Arab States for approval. The proposed changes envisage the following: 1. the character No. 18 in the UN romanization table to be romanized as dh (underlined) instead of "z with a cedilla"; 2. the cedilla to be replaced by a sub-macron in all characters with cedillas.

KHMER

Cambodia presented a document at the 8th UNCSGN outlining the current system of romanization used for Khmer geographical names. Different from the system approved by the United Nations in 1972 (resolution II/10), this provisional system, modified in 1997, does not contain any diacritical marks. While this system is not yet official, it has been submitted to the government for official adoption.

PERSIAN

The Islamic Republic of Iran reported that a Transcription Working Group had been formed at the Iranian Committee for Standardization of Geographical Names (affiliated to the National Cartographic Center). The task of the Working Group would be to review existing transcription methods in order to determine the most efficient methods of rendering geographical names. As a result, several handbooks on names conversion are envisaged.

THAI

Based on resolution VIII/13 (2002) on the romanization of Thai geographical names, the Working Group drafted a new text for the romanization of Thai, intended for inclusion in the Report on the Current Status of United Nations Romanization Systems for Geographical Names. The text was further revised after comments were received from the Royal Thai Survey Department in May 2003, and is currently awaiting final approval from Thailand.

II. Other languages/scripts

BURMESE

Myanmar reported at the 8th UNCSGN that currently no officially approved standardized transliteration system yet existed for the romanization of names in Myanmar but there were plans to establish a permanent committee on geographical names that could also consider issues of romanization.

DZONGKHA

Bhutan provided information at the 8th UNCSGN on a simplified version of Roman Dzongkha, devised by the Dzongkha Development Commission and approved by Bhutan's Ministry of Home Affairs on May 29, 1997. (This system is presented in the Updates to the Report of the Current Status of United Nations Romanization Systems for Geographical Names.) In 2003 the Dzongkha

Development Commission started discussion on further modifications to the system. The main expected changes are: 1) the introduction of hyphen to represent high pitch syllables; 2) distinction between two characters romanized as A (Nos. 23 and 30 in the mentioned Updates); 3) standardization of subfixes (leaving no variants in Roman Dzongkha). The discussion is expected to lead to a final decision in 2005.

GEORGIAN

Correspondence has been held with the State Department of Geodesy and Cartography of Georgia. It was earlier reported that a national romanization system had been adopted in February 2002. On June 24th, 2003 the Instructions for Transliteration of Georgian Geographical Names into Letters of the Roman Alphabet were approved by the State Department of Geodesy and Cartography of Georgia. The system itself remained unchanged. Details are being discussed with the national mapping authority of Georgia.

KOREAN

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea presented reports at the 8th UNCSGN on the romanization of Korean. References on these reports have been included in the Updates to the Report of the Current Status of United Nations Romanization Systems for Geographical Names.

LAO

The delegate from the Lao People's Democratic Republic at the 8th UNCSGN confirmed that currently there is no official romanization system for Lao geographical names in Laos.

MONGOLIAN (CYRILLIC)

The delegate from Mongolia at the 8th UNCSGN confirmed that currently there is no official romanization system for Mongolian geographical names in Mongolia. Earlier often an indirect transcription through other languages/scripts was used but lately the State Administration of Geodesy and Cartography had expressed interest in compiling an official system of romanization for Mongolian.

UKRAINIAN

It has been reported that while the current national romanization system of 1996 is still being used in cartography, discussions are going on in order to improve the system. Official approval of any romanization system would become possible after the adoption of a Law on Geographical Names currently discussed by the Ukrainian Parliament.