

**Twenty-ninth session  
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**Item 17 of the provisional agenda**

**Toponymic guidelines for map and other editors for international use**

## **Toponymic Guidelines (South Africa) Summary**

Submitted by South Africa \*

## **SUMMARY TO BE READ TO INTRODUCE THE SUBJECT DURING THE SESSION**

### **AGENDA ITEM 17**

#### **TOPONYMIC GUIDELINES (SOUTH AFRICA)**

##### **INTRODUCTION**

The history of South Africa and its peoples allowed for many languages to be spoken and the geographical names of South Africa are thus derived from a number of languages of which the first two that explorers came into contact with were the Bushman dialects and Khoe (various dialects). Other indigenous languages are the Sotho languages: Sesotho sa Leboa (Northern Sotho), Sesotho (Southern Sotho) and Setswana (Tswana); the Nguni languages: IsiXhosa (Xhosa), IsiZulu (Zulu), Siswati and IsiNdebele (Southern Ndebele); Xitsonga (Tsonga) and Tshivenda (Venda). Non-African languages influencing the South African toponymy include English, Dutch, Indian Languages, Portuguese, Dutch, French and German. An important contribution is made by Afrikaans, a language that developed from contact between the Dutch, French and German officials and their Malay and Khoe.

In the present edition attention will be given primarily to geographical names from the eleven official languages of the country, namely, in alphabetical order, **Afrikaans, English, Nguni languages (IsiZulu, IsiXhosa, IsiNdebele, Siswati), Sotho languages (Sesotho sa Leboa, Sesotho, Setswana), Tshivenda, Xitsonga** and names from **Bushman** and **Khoe** languages (on which a comprehensive investigation has been carried out by experts, and the results published in various publications mentioned in Chapter 6 as Source material. Other historically relevant languages like Dutch, Portuguese, German, French and Indian languages will be mentioned. In view of the divergence of the African languages and the fact that these languages are in the process undergoing reformulation of their orthographies, geographical names from these languages should not be regarded as immutable at this stage.

##### **OFFICIAL LANGUAGES**

After the change of government in 1994 South Africa's bilingual language policy was replaced by a multilingual policy. The new constitution gave official status to the above mentioned nine indigenous languages and the two former official languages that is eleven languages spoken by a substantial number of speakers in the country, also allowing for the promotion of languages brought in by immigrants, for instance Portuguese, German, French and Indian languages.

##### **GENERAL REMARKS**

The eleven official languages of the Republic of South Africa are all written in the Roman script, as are all the other languages from which geographical names in South Africa have been derived. The click or suction consonants encountered in the Bushman and Khoe languages (cf.

par.4.4) are not reflected in geographical names.

Regardless of the language from which a geographical name is derived, that name has official status if it is the name of an official place,(cf. par. 2) and if it has been approved by the national geographical names authority of South Africa. It is thus recognized that the toponymic landscape is multilingual. Once the spelling of a geographical name has been standardised in a certain language, this is its official status.

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