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CARTOGRAPHY

Fourth United Nations Conference on the Standardization  
of Geographical Names

Report of the Secretary-General

1. In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 1978/7, of 11 April 1978, the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names was convened at the United Nations Office at Geneva from 24 August to 14 September 1982.
2. The Conference was attended by 136 representatives and observers from 62 countries, 1/ one regional commission, two specialized agencies, four intergovernmental and international scientific organizations and one non-governmental organization. The agenda of the Conference was prepared by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, which convened its ninth session from 17 to 27 February 1981 at United Nations Headquarters.
3. The proceedings of the Conference are being published in two volumes. Volume I 2/ contains the report of the Conference and the resolutions adopted; volume II 3/ will contain the reports by Governments on progress made, the technical papers submitted by participants to the Conference and the reports of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names on its eighth, ninth and tenth sessions.
4. The Conference adopted 26 resolutions, the most important of which are summarized below. Recommendations for action by the Council are contained in paragraph 16 below.

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\* E/1983/30.

United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names

5. The Conference made the following recommendations to the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names for consideration in the future work of the Group.

(a) The Group should, at its next session, initiate the systematization of the experience acquired so far by preparing a handbook of general technical and methodological principles for the standardization of geographical names, which could be used by interested countries as a guide in the elaboration of their own standardization procedures; the document in question should be circulated to all participating countries and should be examined at the next Conference.

(b) In order to assist Member States which are beginning or are in the initial stage of national standardization, the Group should examine at its eleventh session the possibility of developing a manual of simplified guidelines by amplifying recommendations A, B and C of resolution 4 of the first United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. 4/

(c) The task of the Working Group on Undersea and Maritime Features should be limited to maritime features; the Group of Experts should identify a point of contact to carry out essential liaison and communications regarding names of undersea features proposed by national bodies.

(d) The Working Group on Extraterrestrial Features should be dissolved; the chairman of the Working Group should continue to maintain liaison between the United Nations Group of Experts and the Working Group for Planetary System Nomenclature of the International Astronomical Union.

(e) The Group should consider the conversion of non-Arabic writing systems into Arabic script and, in particular, whether or not non-Roman writing systems should be converted into Arabic script through the medium of the Roman alphabet.

(f) The Group should, at its next session, request the Working Group on a Single Romanization System for each Non-Roman Writing System to discuss any system that might be submitted to it and to report its findings to the Group of Experts at its following session.

(g) The Indian Division of the Group should undertake further studies in Urdu and Bangla in conjunction with the experts of Pakistan and Bangladesh, and Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka should be associated in carrying out those studies.

(h) The Group should continue its efforts to standardize geographical names at the national and international level.

(i) The Group should examine the possibility of preparing a document combining and modifying, where appropriate, the separate documents, which are United Nations decisions, modus operandi, aims and functions and rules of procedure, defining the activities of the Group of Experts, in order to improve the effectiveness of its future activities.

(j) In order to provide a means whereby the working groups could operate more effectively, their activities should be governed in accordance with the statement to this effect adopted by the Group at its ninth session. 5/

(k) The Group should continue to encourage its geographical/linguistic divisions to be more active in implementing the decision of the United Nations conferences on the standardization of geographical names, as applicable, in working out reporting schedules on their activities to all States within their divisions and to the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names; the divisions should promote the exchange of information among them, and, for this purpose, should make available to the other divisions, as frequently as possible, the results of their work in the way deemed appropriate.

(l) The Group should appoint a correspondent to co-ordinate the work of developing national toponymic guidelines and to maintain communication with national experts involved in the development of such guidelines.

6. The Conference, confirmed the requirement for the continued operation of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, recommended that the possibility of the provision of funds for the financing of the meetings of the Group of Experts should be investigated.

#### Writing systems

7. The Conference recommended that new romanization systems for international use should be considered only on the condition that the sponsoring nations implement such systems on their cartographic products (maps and charts) and that States should refrain from revising systems previously adopted for international use.

#### National standardization

8. The Conference, recognizing that discrepancies in geographical names did not only cause confusion when they occur on maps, but also when they are found in material and documents issued for purposes such as transportation and tourism, economic studies and telecommunications, and recognizing further the cultural and social importance of geographical names, recommended that the standardization of geographical names should be accelerated by all possible means.

#### Toponymic guidelines for map and other editors

9. The Conference recommended that countries should be encouraged to publish and keep up to date toponymic guidelines for map and other editors which may enable cartographers of other countries to treat correctly all problems of cartographic toponymy of the countries that produced such guidelines and which may be of help to all users in interpreting maps. Those guidelines should contain, inter alia, and, as appropriate: information on the legal status of geographical names in the respective languages of multilingual countries; the alphabets of the language or languages and furthermore, in the case of non-Roman alphabets and scripts, the officially introduced romanization keys; the spelling rules for geographical names; and aids to pronunciation of geographical names.

List of country names - Terminology glossary

10. The Conference, noting that the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names and the United Nations Secretariat had similar programmes to prepare and to maintain a list of country names, recommended that the two activities should be co-ordinated. It also recommended that each country should co-operate in the completion of the list.

11. In addition, the Conference, noting the availability of English, French and Spanish versions of a glossary of the terminology used in the standardization of geographical names, recommended the establishment of the Arabic version of that glossary.

Exonyms

12. The Conference recommended that exonyms giving rise to international problems should be used very sparingly and published in parentheses with the nationally accepted standard name.

Education and training in cartographic toponymy

13. Taking account of the success of the first pilot training course in toponymy, held in Cisarua, Indonesia, in June 1982, 6/ the Conference recommended that similar courses and seminars should be held in other geographical/linguistic divisions of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names and that a submission should be made for the provision of the necessary funds for such courses and seminars.

14. The Conference also recommended that each country should aim at providing training in cartographic toponymy at the university or corresponding academic level.

Fifth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

15. The Conference expressed its appreciation to the Government of Canada for its offer to act as host for the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names and recommended that the Conference should be convened in Canada not later than the second half of 1987.

ACTION RECOMMENDED

16. The Council may wish to take the following action:

(a) To endorse the recommendation that the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names should be held not later than the second half of 1987 and to accept the offer of the Government of Canada to be the host country;

(b) To request the Secretary-General to take practical measures, where appropriate, for the implementation of the recommendations of the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, especially with regard to the work of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.

#### Notes

1/ Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Australia, Bahrain, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Costa Rica, Cuba, Cyprus, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, France, German Democratic Republic, Germany, Federal Republic of, Greece, Holy See, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iran, (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Netherlands, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Spain, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Venezuela, Yugoslavia.

2/ Fourth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, Geneva, 24 August-14 September 1982, vol. I, Report of the Conference (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.83.I.7).

3/ To be issued.

4/ See United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, Geneva, 4-22 September 1967, vol. I, Report of the Conference (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.68.I.9), chap. III.

5/ Document E/CONF.74/L.44, annex VI.

6/ See E/CONF.74/L.65 and E/CONF/74/L.76.

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