**United Nations Group of Experts on
Geographical Names
Second session**
New York, 3–7 May 2021
Item 12 of the provisional agenda 12*
Geographical names as expressions of culture, heritage and identity (including matters concerning Indigenous, minority and regional languages and multilingualism)

Pronunciation of indigenous place names: inclusion of audio files in the Quebec place names database

Submitted by Canada**

The Commission de toponymie du Québec is the organization responsible for managing place names in Quebec. Its mandate is to officialize and disseminate place names against a backdrop of complex issues, in particular the imperative to represent Quebec's various social groups, including 11 Indigenous nations.

In Indigenous communities, oral tradition is recognized as the main way that toponymic heritage is passed from one generation to another. The fragile nature of this tradition, as well as past, recent and forecast disruptions to territories frequented by Indigenous communities, lend a degree of urgency to the work of cataloguing and publishing Indigenous toponymy.

The Commission wishes to preserve and promote Indigenous place names, which are a precious part of Quebec's intangible cultural heritage, and to ensure that these place names are passed on from generation to generation. Over the years, the Commission has taken many steps to fulfil this mission, not only by formalizing place names stemming from various Indigenous languages, but also by publishing information on the meanings and origins of these names and by disseminating traditional Indigenous names that are not official.

Policy on Indigenous place names

Since 1987, the Commission de toponymie's *Politique relative aux noms autochtones* [policy on Indigenous place names] has guided its handling of Indigenous toponymy. This policy is built on several core principles, including the following:

- The Commission recognizes the importance of Indigenous toponymy as an integral part of our collective toponymic heritage;

- Thus, when naming places in areas inhabited or frequented by Indigenous peoples, the Commission gives particular consideration to First Nations and Inuit toponymy;

- Consultation with the community, particularly with local band councils, is key to the handling of Indigenous toponyms.

In view of the principle that places should have a single place name, and given the need for place names to be understood by non-experts and serve as effective landmarks, the Commission has elected to officialize Indigenous place names using the Roman alphabet, while respecting the preferred standardized writing systems used by the various nations and communities. Furthermore, to comply with the *Charter of the French Language*, the statute governing the management of toponyms in Quebec, the generic part of an official place name must be in French.

In 2019–2020, the Commission officialized 1,505 place names, including 217 names of Indigenous origin. As of January 1, 2021, about 10.3% of Quebec's roughly 130,000 official toponyms (excluding the names of thoroughfares) were Indigenous in origin.

Publishing Indigenous toponymy on the Web

Indigenous toponymy is disseminated primarily on the Commission de toponymie's website (www.toponymie.gouv.qc.ca) and based on the Banque de noms de lieux du Québec [database of Quebec place names], which contains all official and former place names.

Each place name in the database has a corresponding toponymic record containing information on the place and the origin and meaning of its name, when known.

Figure 1. Example of a toponymic record for an official place name, **Passe Qurngu**.

In addition to officializing names of Indigenous origin, the Commission adds traditional (unofficial) Indigenous place names in various Indigenous languages to the Quebec place names database every year. These names may be entirely in a language other than French.

To date, the Commission has published over 1,500 traditional Indigenous place names online.

Figure 2. Example of a toponymic record for a traditional Indigenous variant, **Aaupaasich**.

Aaupaasich *(Passe)* - Variante traditionnelle autochtone
Passe Qurngu - Nom officiel

Origine et signification

Aaupaasich, ou Àupàsich, est le nom que les Cris utilisent pour désigner la passe Qurngu. Il signifie « le petit passage », dans le sens de « rétrécissement ».

Source :
MACKENZIE, Marguerite. *Enquête Cris. Dossier général*, 1977.

QUÉBEC. COMMISSION DE TOPONYMIE. *La toponymie des Cris*, 2003, page 35.

Date de désofficialisation	Région administrative Nord-du-Québec
Spécifique Aaupaasich	Municipalité régionale de comté (MRC) Hors MRC
Générique (avec ou sans particules de liaison)	Municipalité Baie-d'Hudson (Territoire non organisé)
Type d'entité Passe	Code géographique de la municipalité 99904

Putting pronunciations online

Resolution I/4 on national standardization, adopted at the first United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, recommended that national gazetteers include information that would help geographical names be better understood, such as pronunciation in the system of the International Phonetic Association. However, with modern technology, pronunciation can be easily integrated using audio files, eliminating the need to fastidiously transcribe each name in the International Phonetic Alphabet.

During the International Year of Indigenous Languages in 2019, the Commission began using this new method to promote Quebec's Indigenous toponymy. In addition to officializing Indigenous-language place names and publishing traditional Indigenous variants of select official toponyms, the Commission started integrating pronunciation audio files into some of the Indigenous toponym records in the Quebec place names database.

Place names with pronunciation audio files are available both in the Quebec place names database and in a section of the Commission's website specifically devoted to Indigenous toponymy (www.toponymie.gouv.qc.ca/ct/toponymie-autochtone/liste-noms-autochtones-traditionnels/prononciation-noms-autochtones.aspx) to make this information more easily accessible.

Clicking on a name in the list opens up its toponymic record and displays all the information it contains, including the meaning of the name. To hear the name pronounced, users just have to click on the symbol underneath the name.

Figure 3. Example of a toponymic record for a place name with a pronunciation audio file, **Lac Petapan**.

To make this entirely new way of promoting Indigenous place names accessible, the Commission worked with the Avataq Cultural Institute, the Inuit cultural organization of Nunavik in the Nord-du-Québec region. The first 125 toponyms to have an audio file added to their records in the Quebec place names database were therefore in Inuktitut.

In 2020, 283 additional recordings of Inuit toponyms were sent in by Avataq and added to the Quebec place names database.

Through its "Toponymes coups de cœur" [favourite toponyms] activity, which recognizes the best officialized names of the year, the Commission has promoted a few toponyms of Indigenous origin: two in Innu and one in Atikamekw. The Commission reached out to the communities that had provided the winning names to obtain the pronunciations and disseminate them online.

As of January 20, 2021, 411 official names in Inuktitut, Innu and Atikamekw had been posted online along with pronunciation audio files.

As more and more place names of Indigenous origin enrich our toponymic landscape, the Commission's initial objective is to include pronunciation audio files with all newly officialized Indigenous-language place names added to its database.

The Commission intends to maintain and enhance its relationships with contacts in various nations and continue working with different communities to obtain and make more pronunciation recordings available.

Ultimately, the Commission hopes that the public will be able to listen to the pronunciation of every Indigenous place name in the database, originating from the languages of the 11 Indigenous nations in Quebec.

Points for discussion

The Group of Experts is invited to:

(a) Take note of the progress made toward promoting and preserving Indigenous-language toponyms.

(b) Discuss and report on similar work undertaken in other countries.