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Item 4(a) of the provisional agenda *

**Reports by Governments on the situation in their countries and on the progress made in the
standardization of geographical names**

**Report on the Activities on the national standardization of the names of
geographical objects of the Republic of Armenia**

Submitted by Armenia **

Summary

On November 23, 1999, the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia adopted the Law “On Geographical Names”, which establishes the legal basis for renaming, recording, preserving and using geographical names as the most important component of the historical and cultural heritage of the Armenian people.

In pursuance of the aforementioned Law, a specialized Department on Geographical Names has been established within the Cadastre Committee of the Republic of Armenia.

The Government of Armenia is responsible for approving the names of geographical objects in the territory of the Republic of Armenia. There are also advisory bodies that develop proposals for the standardization of geographical names.

In 2000, the Government of the Republic of Armenia established the “Special Commission on Geographical Names”, which operates under the Committee of Cadastre and evaluates proposals regarding the establishment, change and spelling of the names of geographical objects.

Lists of established geographical names are published in the official Government Newsletter (Gazetteers).

As of now, the Department has collected and compiled over 42,000 names of geographical objects on the basis of field and cameral research.

* GEGN.2/2023/1

**Prepared by the Republic of Armenia

In order to automate the accounting and registration of geographical names, the ArmGeoNames system software was created, with the main task of prompting issuance of information on accounting and registration, the creation and maintenance of a state catalogue, the publication of newspapers, general and thematic dictionaries, reference books, as well as providing information to legal entities and individuals.

Using the above-mentioned resource, the Cadastre Committee prepared and published about 30 dictionaries and reference books, which are in high demand. Given the great interest towards these publications, the Committee intends to continue works in this direction, using the most modern digital technologies.

Currently, the specialists in geographic names are involved in the activities of standardizing address components and correcting existing inaccuracies in the relevant databases throughout the territory of the Republic of Armenia.

Special normative rules were adopted for the translation of geographical names of the Republic of Armenia into foreign languages.

§ I. When translating the geographical names of the Republic of Armenia into foreign languages, it is necessary to be guided by the following provisions:

1. Names of settlements and administrative units established by the government bodies of the Republic of Armenia are included in official Government Newsletter (Gazetteers) and reference books.
2. All other geographical names of the Republic of Armenia are translated into foreign languages with their correct Armenian form, as certified by official sources.
3. In the absence of official materials in Armenian, the form adopted by the most authoritative cartographic and literary sources is provided. At the same time, mandatory corrections are requested in accordance with the list of terms and dictionaries of the Armenian language.
4. Foreign geographical names are translated from Armenian writing and pronunciation, but in some parts of Armenia with a predominant non-Armenian population (Russians, Yezidis, Assyrians, etc.), it is allowed to translate the names of geographical objects from the languages of these nationalities, if such translation is confirmed in cartographic and other publications.
5. As an exception from the accepted rules, it is allowed to translate the names of a number of physical and geographical objects in accordance with the accepted traditional spelling, reflected in cartography and literature.

§ II. Various cartographic and literary sources are used to establish the exact spelling of Armenian geographical names.

§ III. The main cartographic sources are large-scale maps of various years of publication.

§ IV. Newspapers, various reference books, dictionaries, medieval manuscripts, can be used as literary sources.

§ V. Armenian geographical names are transferred/transmitted into the literary form of the language when it is written in the modern script of the Armenian language. With a slight deviation, dialect differences in the territory of the Republic of Armenia, as a rule, are not reflected in transcription

ISO 9985:1996 (E) is used in the process of standardization of names of geographical objects in the territory of the Republic of Armenia.

Historical overview

Armenian toponyms have been formed over many centuries and this process has been closely intertwined with political, economic and cultural activities of the Armenian people since ancient times. Armenian toponyms are presented in numerous ancient cartographic resources, such as the Babylonian map of the world, the atlas of Ptolemy, the map of Peutinger, etc.

The name Armenia has first appeared in the Behistun inscription (6th century BC). Armenia and Armenian toponyms are mentioned in numerous Roman, Greek and Persian sources of classical and late antique periods, including the works of Strabo, Pliny the Elder, Claudius Ptolemy, Plutarch, Dio Cassius and other ancient authors. The most prominent historical state emerged in the territory of Armenia is the Kingdom of Greater Armenia (189 BC – 428 AD), ruled by Artashesyan (*Artaxiad*) and Arshakuni (*Arsacid*) dynasties.

The placenames of Armenia have been frequently associated with the perception and influence of people of the environment, or political events in the region. Notably, following the adoption of Christianity as state religion in Armenia in 301 AD, in the medieval period it has been common practice to name placenames after saints and monasteries.

Being located at the crossroads of civilizations, Armenia throughout its history has been subject to foreign invasions, which has often resulted in distortions of the toponymic landscape of the country, loss of the national image of the toponym, its historical, cultural and scientific value.

The morphological fragmentation of Armenia, with a certain geographic isolation of the communities from each other due to the mountainous terrain and their types of activities, as well as variety of population dialects led to different reading or pronunciation of the placenames.

Legal basis for the standardization of the names of geographical objects of the Republic of Armenia

On November 23, 1999, the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia adopted the Law “On Geographical Names”, which establishes the legal basis for naming, renaming, recording and using, as well as the regulation, legalization, registration and preservation of geographical names as the most important component of the historical and cultural heritage of the Armenian people.

According to Article 14 of the Law on Geographical Names of the Republic of Armenia, the geographical names of Armenia are under state protection. The Cadastre Committee of the Republic of Armenia is the authorised state administration body in the field of geographical names.

While the Government of Armenia is responsible for approving the names of geographical objects in the territory of the country, there are also advisory bodies that develop proposals for the standardization of geographical names.

In pursuance of the relevant provisions of the above-mentioned Law, the Cadastre Committee of Armenia closely cooperates with relevant international organisations, as well as provides information on geographical names to individuals and legal entities of Armenia and other countries. The Republic of

Armenia is an active member of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) with a view of exchanging of information and experience with Member States and other stakeholders.

Means of accessing information on geographical names of the Republic of Armenia

The accessibility of data on geographical names has been a problem for Armenia for many years. The large number of audio, video and printed materials, that have been produced in different countries, contained inaccurate and wrong data undermining the topological field of Armenia, which in turn have caused certain legal problems, that made necessary adoption of several legislative amendments to the Law on Geographical Names.

To address these issues, the Government of Armenia has established the “Special Commission on Geographical Names” in 2000, which operates under the Committee of Cadastre and evaluates proposals regarding the establishment, change and spelling of the names of geographical objects.

The Commission is comprised of linguists, philologists, ethnographers and historians, who work closely with the experts on geographical names of the Geomatics Centre of the Cadastre Committee. In order to improve the quality, as well as to increase the accessibility of geographical names data, the Cadastre Committee also constantly cooperates with the scientific community. Currently the Cadastre Committee utilizes different sources for increase the accessibility of geographical names data, including handbook-dictionaries, official directories, thematic atlases, maps, geographic information systems, online platforms, social networks, books, scientific research, newspapers, etc.

As of now, the list of databases, books, dictionaries, geographical directories and other materials published in order to make geographical names data accessible includes:

- Handbook-Dictionary of Physical Geographic objects of the Republic of Armenia - 2007
- The Dictionary of settlements of the Republic of Armenia- 2008
- List of exonyms of geographical names in Armenian language - 2008
- Official directory of Geographical Names of Aragatsotn Marz, Armenia - 2007
- Official directory of Geographical Names of Armavir Marz, Armenia -2007
- Official directory of Geographical Names of Ararat Marz, Armenia -2007
- Official directory of Geographical Names of Gegharkunik Marz, Armenia -2007
- Official directory of Geographical Names of Yerevan -2008
- Official directory of Geographical Names of Kotayk Marz, Armenia -2007
- Official directory of Geographical Names of Lori Marz, Armenia -2007
- Official directory of Geographical Names of Shirak Marz, Armenia -2007
- Official directory of Geographical Names of Syunik Marz, Armenia -2007
- Official directory of Geographical Names of Vayots Dzor Marz, Armenia -2007
- Official directory of Geographical Names of Tavush Marz, Armenia -2007
- Handbook of the Administrative Territorial Structure of the Republic of Armenia - 2012
- A concise handbook-dictionary of Historical and Architectural Monuments of the Republic of Armenia – 2014
- Concise Handbook-Dictionary of Orographic Site Names of the Republic of Armenia - 2015

- Concise Dictionary of the World's Largest and Most Important Cities - 2016
- Concise gazetteer of the Republic of Armenia - 2016
- Concise handbook-dictionary of hydrographic site names of the Republic of Armenia - 2017.

The publication of official directories of all regions of the Republic of Armenia, in which over 40,000 standardised names of geographical objects have been presented, has a great importance in terms of clarifying and identifying geographical names and it was also made available to local authorities of all settlements.

Thematic atlases and maps of various types and meanings have been published to facilitate the dissemination of geographical names. The two-volume National Atlas of Armenia has already been published in English, and will soon be published in Russian. Publishing of the National Atlas of Armenia in foreign languages serves as an important step in increasing the international recognition of Armenia's geographical names.

The Government of the Republic of Armenia has initiated several draft laws and regulations to ensure the availability of geographical names data. To identify existing gaps and problems, monitoring is continuously carried out, which contributes to the automation of the relevant activities and the quality improvement.

To ensure the publicity and accessibility of the activities carried out, the published literature is provided to government bodies, as well as universities, colleges, schools, district, town and village libraries and other interested organisations. Some of the literature has been provided to TV, radio stations and online media.

Activities on the national standardization of the names of geographical objects of the Republic of Armenia

The issue of having complete, systematic and reliable spatial data and its effective management is one of the challenges in public administration. Thus, the Cadastre Committee aims to create a unified platform of the geographic information system, which implies close cooperation and data exchange with various bodies and organizations.

The Government Decision "On Approval of the Strategic Plan for the Integrated Cadastre" dated 8 April 2021 attaches particular importance to the correction of geographical names and their digitalization. Among other solutions is the creation of a national spatial data infrastructure and the launch of a geoportal, planned by strategic plan of unified Cadastre.

Integration of map layers, addresses and geographic names, registry of names, cadastral archive and text data of real estate is currently being carried out in the National Geoportal of Armenia, which was launched in July 2022. After the completion of the integration process, existing addresses in Armenia, text data and archive will be linked to real estate cadastral maps, while geographical names will be linked to topographic maps.

Introduction of correct geographical names into the National Geoportal of Armenia will allow the addressing process faster (and automatically in the future), and will prevent inaccuracies and

discrepancies. On the other hand, maintaining and updating the geographical names database in the National Geoportal of Armenia will enable geospatial analysis.

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Falsification of Armenian geographical names

The Armenian toponyms constitute an invaluable part of the identity, history and culture of the people of Armenia. The preservation and further standardization of the indigenous geographical names is the main mission of the Cadastre Committee of Armenia. Amongst the biggest challenges for this process is the deliberate falsification of the Armenian toponyms and promotion of fake historical narratives by Azerbaijan that are aimed to deny the millennia-old civilizational presence of the Armenian people in the region.

Over the years Azerbaijan has pursued a policy of elimination of the Armenian historical, cultural and religious heritage in the territories under its control. The destruction, desecration and appropriation of Armenian churches, cemeteries and prominent historical monuments in Nakhijevan and the Azerbaijani-controlled territories of Nagorno-Karabakh is a textbook example in this regard. Misrepresentation of the Armenian religious and cultural monuments as “Caucasian Albanian” is the first stage of their complete destruction.

The falsification of indigenous Armenian geographical names is an integral component of the policy of use of force, racism, hatred and dehumanization of Armenians nurtured at the highest political level. Under the pretext of new administrative divisions, Azerbaijan attempts to deny and erase the name of Nagorno-Karabakh, which has been referred to in the documents of the UN bodies, agencies and regional organizations. Notably, in April 2021 Azerbaijan presented a report to the UN Group of Experts on Geographic Names, where all the names of the Armenian settlements in Nagorno-Karabakh were portrayed as a falsification and were replaced by Azerbaijani names.

Emboldened by the lack of accountability for its policy of distortion of the toponymic landscape of the region, Azerbaijan has opted for the falsification of standardized geographical names of the locations in the territory of the Republic of Armenia. As part of its state policy of Armenophobia and expansionist goals, Azerbaijan attempts to falsify the names of towns, cities, villages and other geographical objects of Armenia, including its capital city Yerevan. Moreover, Azerbaijan has repeatedly falsified geographical names of the Republic of Armenia in its correspondence circulated as official documents of the United Nations General Assembly, Security Council, ECOSOC and their subsidiary bodies.

Azerbaijan’s deliberate and manipulative falsification of the Armenian geographical names is utterly incompatible with the letter and spirit of UNGEGN resolutions and recommendations. The policy of changing the original and indigenous names of Armenian settlements goes counter to the universally accepted standards of naming of geographical objects.

The list of geographical names of the Republic of Armenia, standardized by the Cadastre Committee of the Republic of Armenia is attached to this report, which should be the only reference point for the geographical names of the Republic of Armenia. The strong and consistent stance of the United Nations bodies and agencies is of utmost importance to respond to the policy of falsification of the Armenian geographical names.