



## **Minutes of the meeting of the UNGEGN Working Group on Romanization Systems** (New York, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2023)

The UNGEGN Working Group on Romanization Systems (WGRS) met during the 2023 Session of UNGEGN in New York on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2023. It was attended by c.20 participants, including from Austria, Finland, France, Greece, Japan, Kingdom of the Netherlands, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mauritania, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Slovenia, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, as well as the Convenors, Mr Peeter Päll (Estonia) and Ms Catherine Cheetham (United Kingdom).

Ms Cheetham mentioned ongoing discussions regarding the creation of romanization systems with multiple countries. Several countries who are developing romanization systems in their countries had been invited to this meeting.

### **Mongolian**

Mr Päll reported that no evidence had been found of the introduction of the Mongolian script in Mongolia. Mr Watanabe (Japan) shared his experience regarding writing the Japanese script vertically.

### **Mauritania**

Mr Hameiniy Ould Sidi (Mauritania) discussed the problem of harmonizing Arabic/French geographical names in Mauritania. He reported that a database of all Mauritanian localities in Arabic and French had been created for use by the authority that registers births and marriages, and was now available to all government departments. Ms Calvarin (France) recalled a bilateral agreement between the French and Mauritanian governments for rendering names and suggested that changing it could be problematic, given its widespread implementation on maps. Mr Hameiniy Ould Sidi mentioned a database of traditional Arabic names, from 2015, that included Tamazight names. An interesting example was the Tamazight name meaning 'dogs valley', while the Arabic name meant 'prosperity'.

### **Indian Group Languages**

There was no delegation from India at this meeting and there was no progress to report.

### **Khmer**

Ms Cheetham noted that the Working Group would endeavour to continue discussions with Cambodia on the implementation of the 1997 transcription system for the romanization of Khmer in Cambodia.

### **Sinhala**

Ms Cheetham reported that the Working Group planned to continue discussions with officials from Sri Lanka regarding the implementation of the new Sinhala romanization system.

### **Lao**

Ms Lorkhamyong (Lao People's Democratic Republic) described the status of Lao romanization. The National Geographic Department of the Lao People's Democratic Republic had developed draft Toponymic Guidelines consisting of two parts, one for general writing systems and the other for romanization. The department had requested feedback and comments from ministries, which would

be incorporated into a final draft to be submitted to the government for approval. A new mandate for geographical names had been created, and in 2007, a law on mapping and surveying had been approved.

Ms Cheetham elaborated on the process by which donor countries prepared their romanization systems (with WGRS assistance if desired), implemented them on official national products and then worked with the Working Group towards promulgating the new system as a UN romanization system. The Convenors hoped that the Lao romanization system would be approved soon.

Mr Päll recalled that two or three years ago, comments on the Lao romanization system had been sent to the Lao People's Democratic Republic. The co-Convenors expressed their willingness to help should any questions arise concerning these comments.

### **Cabo Verde**

Ms Cheetham recalled the presentation of the delegate from Cabo Verde who had reported that Creole in various forms appeared alongside Portuguese.

### **Kazakh**

Ms Cheetham described the intention to use the Roman script for Kazakh. Despite various Roman script orthographies having been suggested, the adoption of the Roman script alphabet in Kazakhstan had not yet been achieved. The Working Group would continue to monitor this transition.

### **Uzbek**

Although the Roman script had been adopted for Uzbek in 1993, its implementation had never been fully realised, with much Uzbek and Russian Cyrillic still being used. A new script similar to other Turkic languages' alphabets had been proposed in 2022, and the Working Group would monitor the proposed adoption and endeavour to discuss with Uzbek names experts.

### **Tajik**

No new information for Tajik romanization had been found, but the Working Group would share any information if found.

### **Innovative tools**

Ms Cheetham suggested the Working Group consider innovative tools for romanization and requested members to share information. Mr Hogerwerf (Kingdom of the Netherlands) updated the group on the Transcriptor web application for romanizing non-Roman names, including its use of both Dutch and other international romanization systems<sup>1</sup> and an exonyms list. In 2022 the modules for the Ukrainian and Russian languages were published. Modules for other languages (Arabic) are still in development. Mr Päll reported on an auto transliteration system by CalConnect that was used within ISO, while Mr Alshafaey (Saudi Arabia) reported on tools for romanizing Arabic which he offered to share with the Working Group. The Working Group expressed interest in learning more about AI for transliteration, and urged the working group to share any experiences.

### **Implementation of UNGEGN Romanization Systems**

The Working Group was keen to monitor the implementation of UN Romanization Systems in international use (both within the UN System and by Member States). Ms Cheetham requested that members consider their own countries' use of UN romanization systems, particularly for international maps. The convenors would send requests for information to members to collect and assess this data for the Working Group to promote their work within the UN.

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<sup>1</sup> *Transcriptor* searches return a list of possible romanizations according to various romanization systems (including UNGEGN, ALA-LC, BGN-PCGN, ISO and several libraries systems).

**Convenorship**

Ms Cheetham warmly thanked Mr Päll for his exemplary contribution to the Working Group since becoming a member in 1994, Convenor since 1998 and co-Convenor since 2017. He wished to stand down from the convenorship, but continue to be an active member, and Ms Cheetham would continue to be Convenor. The rest of the Working Group applauded him.

The Convenors thanked the participants for attending and for their contributions.

*Notes taken by Mrs A Dollimore, United Kingdom*