

It is recognized that a prerequisite for national standardization is the documentation of geographical names for countries having Amharic, Arabic and Thai alphabets. International usage can be based only upon the results of domestic standardization. For further comments, reference is made to the paper presented by the Federal Republic of Germany under agenda item 11.

21. ALPHABETIC WRITING FORMS OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES FOR COUNTRIES HAVING IDEOGRAPHIC WRITING SYSTEMS

Recommendation XXI of the Group of Experts is approved.

Reference is made to the paper presented by the Federal Republic of Germany under agenda item 11.

THE ROMAN ALPHABET RULE

Paper presented by the United Kingdom*

For the last twenty-five years, the work of the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (PCGN) has been firmly based on what it calls the "Roman alphabet rule", that is, the principle of accepting the official forms of foreign geographical names if they are officially written in or officially transcribed into forms of the Roman alphabet.

The first part of this rule is now generally accepted. Most Roman-alphabet countries adopt without alteration the spellings of names in other Roman-alphabet countries. Although it may not be possible in all circumstances to reproduce unfamiliar diacritics, at least the basic alphabetic shape is preserved unchanged. But the significance of the second part of the rule is much less widely appreciated and it may be useful to expand upon its importance in international standardization. It applies to those countries which, although their national languages are not written in the Roman alphabet, make use of Romanized forms of their names for one or more of the following administrative purposes:

The production of basic topographic mapping (e.g. Ireland, India, Pakistan, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia,

* The original text of this paper appeared as document E/CONF. 53/L.57.

Muscat and Oman, Kuwait, Trucial States, South Arabia);

The production of medium-scale mapping kept up to date by periodic revision (e.g. Israel);

As a component in bilingual mapping (e.g. Ceylon, United Arab Republic, Lebanon, Syria, Sudan, Jordan, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, Burma).

The rule does not apply to small-scale Romanized maps produced officially for information, tourist or other non-administrative purposes.

The advantages to standardization offered by these hundreds of thousands of Romanized names throughout large areas of the world would seem self-evident, yet it is not uncommon to find atlases, small-scale maps and gazetteers where names in India are transliterated from Hindi, names in Pakistan transliterated from Urdu and Bengali, names in Israel Romanized by systems different from that used by the Survey of Israel and names in the United Arab Republic Romanized by systems different from that used by the Survey of Egypt etc.

It is true that these administrative Romanization systems do not always accurately reflect the true form of the name in the national language, and it is to be hoped that in such cases the national gazetteer will provide this information.

DISCUSSION OF THE REPORT OF THE GROUP OF EXPERTS

Paper presented by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics¹

Recommendation I²

The USSR delegation shares the opinion of the experts as to the necessity of organizing national names authorities in every country to work on the standardization of geographical names. These authorities should have definite duties and responsibilities. They should meet regularly and work in accordance with a plan.

National names authorities should promote the activities of government bodies, ministries, departments, publishing houses and other agencies in promulgating standard names in all publications of the country.

National names authorities should elaborate rules for spelling and rendering foreign geographical names and also compile uniform dictionaries of standard geographical names (gazetteers); these are of great importance for both national and international standardization. The dictionaries should give both the rendered and the original forms

¹ The original text of this paper appeared as document E/CONF. 53/L.47.

² The reference is to the recommendations contained in the first report of the Group of Experts. See annex, p. 151.

of a name, the type of feature and the administrative division to which it belongs, and include some brief physiographic information on natural features. Out-of-date names should be inserted side by side with the new names which have come into use. It is preferable to publish dictionaries in large editions to allow for their extensive use.

Recommendation II

The standardization of geographical names within the country should be achieved by the national names authorities in accordance with uniform instructions. These instructions, we believe, should include general principles of names standardization and rules for rendering names from different languages (for multilingual countries). They should point out the cartographic, literary and reference sources needed to ascertain the authentic name of any geographical entity and should include information on the dissemination of languages and the rendering of geographical terms, as well as rules for the spelling of compound names.