

Recommendations on the proposed romanization system for Arabic (2007)

Members of the UNGEGN WG on Romanization Systems studied in detail the unified Arabic romanization system that was adopted by the Third Arabic Conference in Beirut in 2007, based on the agreement by Arabic experts at the 8th United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN) in 2002 in Berlin. The system, as published on the website of the Arabic Division of UNGEGN (www.adegn.org) and as document E/CONF.98/CRP.29/EN of the 9th UNCSGN in 2007 is hereafter referred to as **ADEGN 2007 System**, while the currently valid UN approved system is called **UN 1972 System**.

Working Group members, while welcoming efforts of the Arabic Division to achieve a common unified system of romanization for Arabic, would like to make the following recommendations and comments concerning ADEGN 2007 System.

1. As a necessary prerequisite for romanization, Arabic geographical names should be standardized and fully vocalized, following the phonetic and grammatical rules of the Arabic standard literary language (*al-fuṣḥá*). It is recommended at this stage to explicitly omit elements coming from the local dialects, as these are not officially used in any countries or in inter-Arab communication.
2. WG members would recommend to reconsider the romanization of the Arabic character ظ as *dh* (in the UN 1972 System – *z*). For the stability of the system it would be beneficial to keep the previous association with the letter *z*, as this is also evident from many leading dictionaries (Arabic into French, English, Russian and German). Although the use of sub-macrons instead of cedillas could be viewed as a stylistic matter, it should be noted that in cartography using sub-macrons in combination with underlining could cause visual recognition problems.
3. WG members would strongly object to the ambiguous romanization equivalent of *alif maqṣūrah* in ADEGN 2007. The proposed romanization is not easily applicable in Unicode and is confusingly similar to the combination of *a + hamzah*. Instead, the UN 1972 System equivalent *á* is unambiguous and easy to use.
4. With regard to the use of articles, WG members would recommend to follow the established practice of capitalizing the article *al* only in cases when it is written as the first element in a name, e.g. الكَوَّمُ الْأَبْلَقُ *Al-Kawm al-Ablaq*. The same recommendation would apply to the conjunction *wa* 'and'. It would be recommended to use a hyphen between the article and the following word that would better reflect the actual style of writing in Arabic. WG members agree with the assimilation rules for definite articles before words starting with the so-called sun letters.
5. WG members would advise against the use of a slash / as a disambiguation sign in names like أَدْهَمٌ *Ad/ham* (cf. أَدَمٌ *Adham*), أَشْهُمٌ *As/hum* (cf. أَشْمٌ *Ashum*). This is because the slash is used traditionally to separate name variants, e.g. in bilingual names. If there is a strong need to disambiguate some combinations of letters, a middle dot (·) could be used.
6. WG members note with satisfaction the use of *-iyyah* in adjectival endings. This is preferable to *-īyah* as an authentic reflection of the original Arabic spelling. It would be beneficial to have this rule clearly stated.
7. WG members will be happy to provide further comments on the wording and terms used in the document on the romanization rules for Arabic before it would be submitted for approval.