



**Minutes of the meeting of the UNGEGN Working Group on Romanization Systems**  
(New York, 1<sup>st</sup> May 2019)

The UNGEGN Working Group on Romanization Systems (WGRS) met during the 1<sup>st</sup> Session of the new-style UNGEGN in New York on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2019. It was attended by c.25 participants, including from Armenia, Canada, China, Egypt, France, India, Jamaica, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, United States as well as the Convenors, Mr Peeter Päll (Estonia) and Ms Catherine Cheetham (United Kingdom).

**Arabic**

It was recalled that UNGEGN had approved a new system for the romanization of Arabic during the 11<sup>th</sup> UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in August 2017. Mr Alwelaie (Saudi Arabia) reported that the new system had been used in Saudi Arabia when applying names to new maps. It was noted that the system was not used for street names because these are often personal names. Saudi Arabian airports had tried to use the new system, but the space between the name and the definite article had caused problems. Mr Alwelaie wondered if some modifications to the system could be allowed for some users? It was reported that Oman and Jordan had also applied the new system.

Ms Calvarin (France), reported that in France, the first definite article had previously been dropped, but more recently it had been included. The new Arabic romanization system had been used for country names in the list maintained by the WG on Country Names.

**Armenian**

Mr Piloyan (Armenia) reported that since independence in 1991, some 42,000 geographical names had been modified in official gazetteers (20% of the changes resulted from the 'Armenification' of names from the Soviet era). It was noted that there was no UN-approved romanization system for Armenian. In 2018 names in an English-language gazetteer had been romanized to the ISO standard (ISO 9985), however, it was noted that road signs did not always conform to this standard. Over 200,000 names had been published in gazetteers including names translated from other languages into Armenian. Some problems with romanization had been encountered due to the similar pronunciation of some Armenian letters.

**Indian Group Languages**

Ms Cheetham explained that the UN had a number of approved romanization systems relevant to India, but none had been implemented. The India delegation reported that when the 1972 UN Resolution had been passed, there had only been 12 official languages in India, but that now there were 22 official languages and reported on recent work to start the implementation of the UN approved romanization systems. It was also reported that two toponymic courses had been devised to increase awareness and knowledge of the people and professionals working with the new Indian standardized transliteration tables. Ms

Cheetham asked if national maps produced by the Survey of India reflected the state-level languages or if they were in the Hindi language. The WG was informed that India had created a geographical names database that contained names in all additional regional languages which meant that each state could produce hardcopy maps in their state language as per the requirement. Work had begun on a public portal that included a names data layer with options to select a particular regional or state language.

### **Khmer**

Mr Päll reported that the new romanization system was still being discussed within Cambodia.

### **Lao**

The WGRS had reviewed the current draft of the Lao Romanization System prepared by the National Geographic Department of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, and it was understood that the system was nearing completion; WGRS suggestions were told to be accepted. Laos was considering making a law on geographical names and hoped to include the status of the romanization system in the law.

### **Other languages/scripts**

The Convenors hoped that the Kurdish and Tamazight scripts would be added to the WGRS agenda in due course. Mr Päll reported that Sri Lanka had adopted a new system for the romanization of Sinhala (a modification of the ISO standard) as was reported by Sri Lanka in its national report to the UNGEGN session; WGRS had contributed to the content of this system. The Convenors hoped to verify questions about its implementation with Sri Lankan officials in due course.

### **AOB**

It was agreed by the WGRS that Ms Cheetham and Mr Päll would continue to co-chair. The Convenors warmly thanked the participants for attending and for their contributions.

*Notes taken by Mrs A Dollimore, United Kingdom*