



Economic and Social Council

Distr.
LIMITED

E/CONF.91/L.7
6 November 1997

ENGLISH ONLY

SEVENTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE
ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
New York, 13-22 January 1998
Item 4 of the provisional agenda*

REPORTS BY DIVISIONS AND GOVERNMENTS ON THE SITUATION
IN THEIR REGIONS AND COUNTRIES AND ON THE PROGRESS
MADE IN THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
SINCE THE SIXTH CONFERENCE

National report of Israel for the period 1992-1997

Paper submitted by Israel**

* E/CONF.91/1.

** Prepared by Prof. N. Kadmon, Head of the Delegation of Israel.



Since the Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names held in New York in 1992, numerous toponymic issues have been actively dealt with at Government, Public and Private/Commercial level.

1 The National Toponymic Database

The *Survey of Israel*, the Governmental surveying and mapping authority, is the carrier of the national toponymic database which is steadily being built up, in both geometrical and temporal dimensions. Temporally, the database is being updated and names approved by the Government Names Commission are being incorporated, and corrections, renaming and other toponomastic changes are introduced. Geometrically, coordinates are being corrected where necessary. These are now also converted into the New Israeli Topographic Grid which is based on the Israeli Transverse Mercator Cylindrical Projection differing from the former Cassini-Soldner Projection. It should be mentioned that map reference coordinates indicate the location of the topographic feature (i.e. its centre, where relevant, with start-and-end points for linear features) – and not those of the respective annotation. The database was originally based on the *Toponomasticon – Geographical Gazetteer of Israel* [1]. However, a new format is now being devised.

2 New "Plene" Spelling Rules for Hebrew Names in Maps

Hebrew has, in effect, two sets of spelling rules. The first is the fully vocalized orthography ("ketiv haser") based on the texts of the Bible (Old Testament), the Mishnah and the Talmud. This is somewhat cumbersome, and besides, in map work the vocalization marks are frequently lost in the reproduction process. Israelis are taught from grade three to read unvocalized text. Thus, all newspapers and books – with the exception of junior school books and sacred texts – as well as road signs and other notices are printed without the vocalizing points in the so-called plene spelling (ketiv male). This, standardized by the Academy of the Hebrew Language, introduces certain standard consonantic letters (so-called *matres lectionis*) to substitute for vocalization marks. Until recently all maps of the Survey of Israel were printed with full vocalization. The sheets of the new series of digital GIS-derived topographic maps are being produced with all names and other annotations in unvocalized plene spelling.

But while plene spelling is normally adequate for Hebrew texts, names (and in particular foreign names), sometimes require partial vocalization in addition, in order to avoid possible ambiguity. The Survey of Israel is currently dealing with the problem of embodying this in its national database.

It should be stressed that plene orthography does in no way alter pronunciation, and transliteration of Hebrew geographical names is hardly affected.

3 Romanization of Hebrew

As reported in Working Paper No. 5 presented to the 18th Session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names in August 1996 [2], the official romanization system of Hebrew is under review after 40 years of rigorous application by the *Survey of Israel* only. Other bodies have been, and are, using different (unofficial) romanization systems. The official Israeli system was approved by the Third United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in 1977 [3]. Many complaints have been received from various quarters concerning the official system, which is neither very user-friendly nor fully reversible. At the 18th Session of UNGEGN reservations were expressed, mainly by representatives of world-atlas producing countries. Similar reservations were heard in the past from similar sources against the introduction of Pinyin (for Chinese) and Gost 1983 (for Russian Cyrillic). It is important to cater to the needs of actual map users; by far the majority of these are not toponymists, cartographer or scientists but the millions of tourists visiting Israel who must be assisted in *asking* their way around the country with the aid of maps. In such cases a romanization system representing the original Hebrew chiefly *by sound* is preferable to one rigidly representing the *orthography*. See the separate paper to the Seventh Conference on this topic.

A special Commission on Geographical Names Orthography is dealing with this issue. Among the institutions represented on it are the *Survey of Israel*, the Public Works Department, the Government Tourism Corporation, the Nature Reserves Authority, the National Parks Authority (all dealing with mapping and/or road signposting) as well as the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. A survey of tourists on this matter is now being conducted, in order to decide whether changes – and which – should be recommended. This seems to be more than can be claimed by many romanization systems.

4 Exonyms

Following Working Paper L.7 with the title "Donor-recommended exonyms: a different approach to traditional names" presented by Israel to the Sixth UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in New York, 1992 [4], the Commission on Geographical Names Orthography mentioned in para. 3 above has prepared a list of topographic features in Israel for which English exonyms may be used on official road signposts and, as secondary names, in official maps (after the respective official endonym). These are generally English conventional or traditional names following the forms found in the King James (Authorised) version of the Bible. According to the donor system outlined in the paper mentioned above [4], these exonyms or their equivalents in languages other than English, are recommended for use also by foreign map-making and other, especially toponomastic, institutions. See list in a separate paper to the Seventh Conference.

5 Private Mapping Toponymy

As reported already to the Sixth Conference in 1992 [4], there is no uniformity in the application of romanization to geographical names in Israel. Whereas in Hebrew maps of the country produced by private mapping institutions official names are generally used, either fully vocalized or in plene orthography (see para. 2 above), some private publishers of maps in English and in other foreign languages have indeed been using the official romanization system since its introduction 40 years ago, while others use different and divergent systems. The same seems to be true of other countries with non-Roman scripts. In some cases these unofficial romanization systems are more attuned to the needs of the majority of users of romanized maps in Israel, and tend to be more user-friendly (see para. 3 above). In fact, some of the changes in romanization proposed by the Commission on Geographical Names Orthography follow along the same lines. This trend may lead to a narrowing of the gap between the different romanization systems, and might in time eliminate it altogether.

6 Glossary of Toponymic Terminology

The Israeli convenor of the UNGEGN Working Group on Terminology who serves as editor of the *Glossary of Toponymic Terminology* has continued to update, revise and edit the Glossary in English. At the 18th Session of the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names in Geneva in 1996 he presented version 3. At this session the Glossary was finalized and approved, and in this form (version 4) was sent to the UNGEGN Secretariat in New York for distribution to the translators into the five other official languages of the United Nations. Preliminary translations of version 2 had already been made into Chinese, French and Spanish, and these now require only updating to version 4. A German translation had also been printed.

7 International Cooperation

Since the Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, Israel has taken part in toponymic activities in countries of three other geographical-linguistic divisions. The chief delegate of Israel has lectured at two toponymic training courses held in the Republic of South Africa (1992, 1994); at two seminars on the name *Sea of Japan/East Sea* held in Seoul, Korea (one national, 1994, and one international, 1997); and at a national toponymic seminar held by the Department of Survey and Land Information (DOSLI) in New Zealand (Wellington, 1994).

8 Cooperation with the International Cartographic Association and ICOS

The Commission on Education and Training of the International Cartographic Association (Chairman Prof. F. Ormeling) has prepared and published an international manual in three volumes (and a volume of exercises) titled *Basic Cartography for Students and Technicians*. Volume 3 includes a chapter headed "Toponymy – theory and practice of geographical names", written by N. Kadmon. At the suggestion of the Board of Directors of the International Council of Onomastic Science (ICOS) at its meeting in June 1994, the same author prepared a paper describing the tasks and work of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names and the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names. This appeared in 1995 under the title "Luxor or Al-Uqsur – Skagerak, Skagerack or Skagerrak? The United Nations and the standardization of geographical names" in *Onoma* [5].

References

- [1] N. Kadmon, *Toponomasticon – Geographical Gazetteer of Israel*. "Carta" and Survey of Israel, Tel-Aviv, 1994.
- [2] "Theoretical and practical considerations for changes in the romanization of Hebrew". 18th Session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, Geneva, 1996, Working Paper No. 5.
- [3] "Romanization of the Hebrew alphabet". *Third United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names*, Athens, 1977, vol. I, Report of the Conference, Resolution No. 13, pp. 29-33.
- [4] "Donor-recommended exonyms: a different approach to traditional names". *Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names*, New York, 1992,, vol. II, Technical Papers, p. 365.
- [5] N. Kadmon, "Luxor or Al-Uqsur – Skagerak, Skagerack or Skagerrak? The United Nations and the standardization of geographical names". *Onoma*, Journal of the International Council of Onomastic Sciences, vol. 32 (1994-1995), Leuven, 1995, pp. 140-154.