

## Names Transliteration: A Response from the UNGEGN Liaison to IHO

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### Introduction

The issue of the romanization of geographical names has been the subject of documents submitted by our colleagues from Russia at SCUFN 19, 20, and 24. The 24<sup>th</sup> meeting paper is a reproduction of the 20<sup>th</sup> SCUFN Meeting paper. As the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) Liaison to the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) I would like to submit the following comments in response.

### IHO B-6 and transliteration

The standard procedures of SCUFN are specified in IHO B-6 “Standardization of Undersea Feature Names” (ed. 8 June 2008), as addressed in the SCUFN Terms of Reference. The following are extracts from B-6 that may be relevant. Following each extract I have provided additional comments.

The B-6 Foreword states:

*“The Guidelines, the Name Proposal Form and the List of Terms and Definitions contained in this publication have been developed through collaboration between the "GEBCO Sub-Committee on Undersea Feature Names", appointed by the "Joint IOC-IHO Guiding Committee for GEBCO", and the Working Group on Maritime and Undersea Features of the "United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN)", in accordance with provisions of appropriate resolutions of United Nations Conferences on [the Standardization of] Geographical Names [(UNCSGN)].”*

Specific UNCSGN resolutions are not mentioned, but one should assume that this would include all relevant UNCSGN Resolutions. Romanization systems approved by the United Nations are addressed by UNCSGN Resolutions. All Resolutions are available at the UNGEGN website (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/default.html>) and information about UN-recommended romanization systems is also maintained at <http://www.eki.ee/wgrs/>. See Attachment 1 for a list of all UN recommended romanization systems.

Section I.F. of B-6 states:

*“Names not in the writing system of the country applying the names on maps or other documents should be transliterated according to the system adopted by the national authority applying the names.”*

I believe this sentence is potentially misleading within the context of GEBCO activities (as addressed in Point 2 of the paper prepared by Drs. Agapova and Turko). The ideal situation would be that the system adopted by a national authority would be the same as the UN recommended authority, but this is not always the case. Additionally, in the work of SCUFN, the approval is not based upon a national perspective, but rather the international committee of experts. This sentence may require revision to reflect SCUFN’s role in the process of approving undersea feature names for the GEBCO project.

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Section II.A.9 states:

*“Specific elements of names should not be translated from the language of the nation providing the accepted name.”*

Although this section addresses translation, I believe it is an indication that the specific elements of names should be left as they would be in the original language. In my opinion, this would include diacritics. There is further discussion of this topic in the next section of this paper.

Section B.1. states:

*“Generic terms should be selected from the following list of definitions to reflect physiographic descriptions of features.”*

The “following list” is provided in English together with a second language. B-6 versions currently exist for English/French, English/Japanese, English/Korean, English/Russian, and English/Spanish (Note: English/Chinese is in preparation). The GEBCO Gazetteer (IHO Publication B-8) records undersea features names using English generic terms.

## **Summary**

By way of summary I would like to reiterate my opinions on several issues being raised by Drs. Agapova and Dr. Turko.

GEBCO products are to use English generic terms and where necessary, romanization of the specific term should follow the system approved by the United Nations. If no approved system exists for the language concerned, then the customary practice has been for SCUFN to accept the name as romanized by the Member State submitting a proposal.

The specific term within a geographical name may be from any number of languages and in many cases is not necessarily associated with a single language. Within the US Board on Geographic Names we have struggled with the concept of trying to assign language codes (based on ISO 639-2) for foreign place names. It is a difficult challenge and in many cases cannot be done. As names are used throughout a diverse community they tend to lose their unique association with a particular language

UNSCGN Resolution I/10 states:

*“Recognizing that the accents and diacritical signs which accompany the Roman alphabet letters of many languages are an integral part of the spelling of these languages, in which they express such essential features as the tonic accent, the length and degree of openness of vowels, and other significant aspects of pronunciation and meaning, Recommends that in international use all geographical names officially written in these alphabets by the countries concerned should remain unmodified and keep their distinguishing marks, even, and indeed particularly, when they are written in capital letters.”*

I believe this Resolution supports the preservation of diacritics and discourages translation or other “Anglicization” of specific terms, especially for international use. In my opinion it is not correct to view names in the SCUFN gazetteer as English names or German names or Chinese names, etc. They are standardized names with an international flavor. If names lost their original

character the proper association with mainland geographical features or heroes of the ocean sciences would become degraded or lost.

Applicability to pronunciation is not necessarily addressed in B-6. In my personal opinion, names standardization bodies should not involve themselves with standardization of pronunciation. With respect to GEBCO products and projects, the pronunciation is not necessarily important, because the primary intent is for cartographic publications. However, I note that there are some within UNGEGN who do not hold the same view as me concerning the need to standardize pronunciation.

## United Nations Recommended Romanization Systems

<b><u>Language</u></b>	<b><u>Date (Resolution)</u></b>
Amharic	1967 (I/17)
Arabic	1972 (II/8)
Assamese	1972 (II/11), 1977 (III/12)
Bengali	1972 (II/11), 1977 (III/12)
Bulgarian	1977 (III/10)
Chinese	1977 (III/8)
Dari	1967 (I/13)
Greek	1987 (V/19)
Gujurati	1972 (II/11), 1977 (III/12)
Hebrew	1977 (III/13), 2007 (IX/9)
Hindi	1972 (II/11), 1977 (III/12)
Kannada	1972 (II/11), 1977 (III/12)
Khmer	1972 (II/10)
Macedonian Cyrillic	1977 (III/11)
Malayalam	1972 (II/11), 1977 (III/12)
Marathi	1972 (II/11), 1977 (III/12)
Nepali	1972 (II/11), 1977 (III/12)
Oriya	1972 (II/11), 1977 (III/12)
Persian	1967 (I/13)
Punjabi	1972 (II/11), 1977 (III/12)
Russian	1987 (V/18)
Serbian	1977 (III/11)
Tamil	1972 (II/11), 1977 (III/12)
Telugu	1972 (II/11), 1977 (III/12)
Thai	1967 (I/14), 2002 (VIII/13)
Urdu	1972 (II/11), 1977 (III/12)