

# Geographic names authorities, standardization and international cooperation

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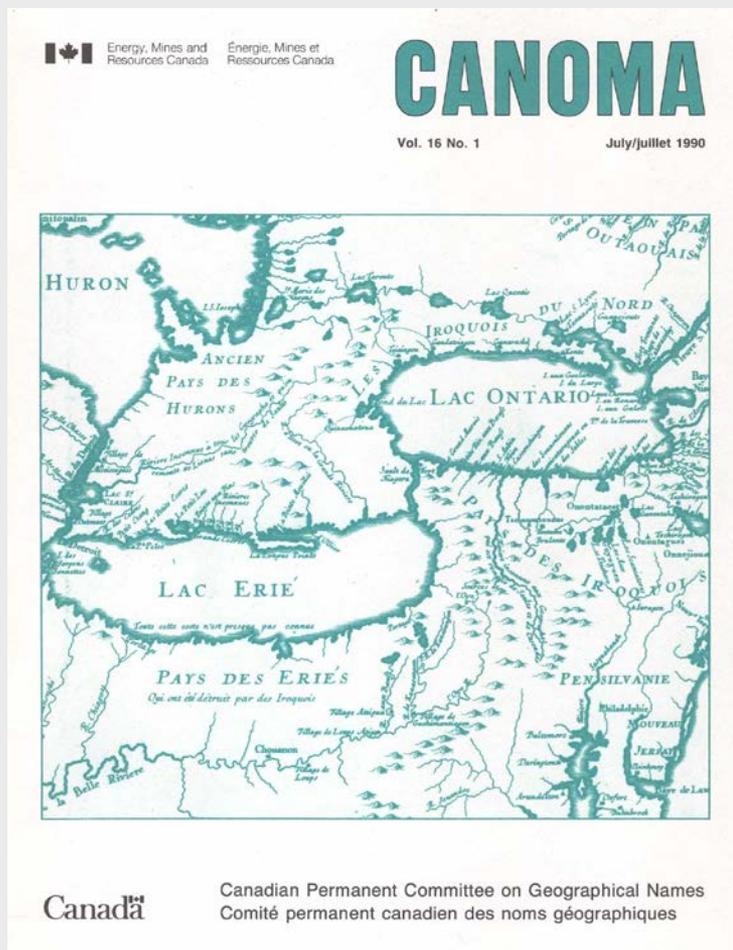


# BGN at 100 years

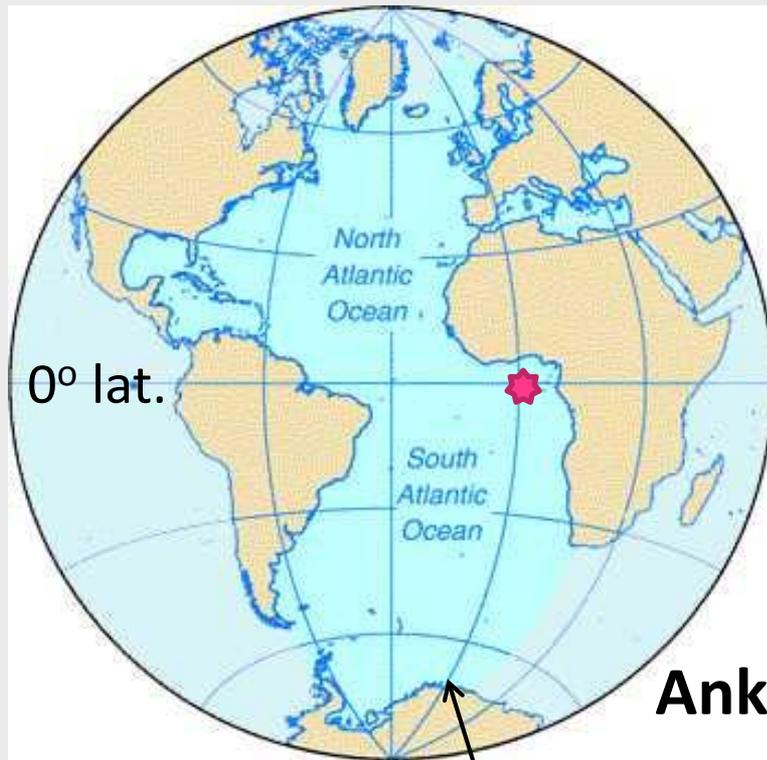


In recognition of international cooperation in toponymy

- Our border through maps and names
- Surveying - 49<sup>th</sup> Parallel in the West
- “USA” in Québec
- Thousand Islands
- Across the Niagara
- Honouring American Presidents
- Men of the International Boundary
- Treatment of names of shared features



# Public enquiry – who can approve a name?



**Anker Point**  
0° long.



He assumed that the United Nations could approve this!



# Early days at the UN

- 1948 – UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)
- 1959 – ECOSOC resolution 715 A (XXVII)
- 1960 – First experts group meeting
- 1967 – First Conference on standardization of geographical names
  - national standardization
  - basis of international standardization
    - romanization
    - resolution I/4 ... foundation



# Cornerstone – names authorities

- Authorities come in “different shapes and sizes”
  - depends on government, nature of country, languages ...
- (1) **No national names authority**  
*National mapping agencies*
- (2) **Centralized names authority**
  - decisions made by one group
  - sub- or advisory committees
  - *Madagascar, Estonia, Hungary*
- (3) **Decentralized authority**
  - decisions at regional level
  - central coordination
  - *Australia, Canada, Malaysia*
- (4) **National and regional level authorities**
  - *USA, South Africa*

## Foreign names boards

e.g. BGN, PCGN,  
*Poland, Bulgaria*



# Street names – demands of urban growth

**China** (Dai, 2006)



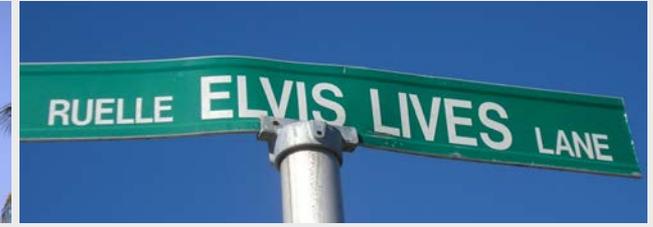
20,000 new urban names each year

**The World** (You, 2009)

- Urban dwellers (UN data)
  - 50% 2008
  - over 80% 2030



# Street names



## World Bank Report, 2005

50% of city streets in sub-Saharan Africa - no names or addresses

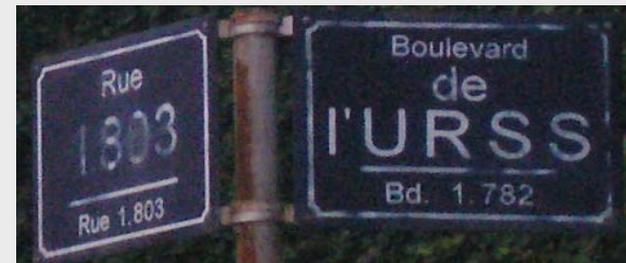
- densification of central core and urban expansion

Financing of street addressing and database initiatives

- use of numbering system, gradually augmented by names

## *Yaoundé, Cameroon*

1670 streets listed; 6 zones; street map printed



# New names board acts – cultural heritage

## Burkina Faso ... décret 2013

- To conserve place names
- To preserve or re-appropriate national toponymic heritage, relevant to culture and language



## Tunisia ... décret 2013

- The CNT - conserving and developing the national toponymic heritage ...
- preserving specifics of spoken Tunisian and assuring studies are undertaken on geographical names



# Language, history, cultural heritage, identity

Toponyms link man and the land; points of reference;  
bearers of history and language; carriers of our identity

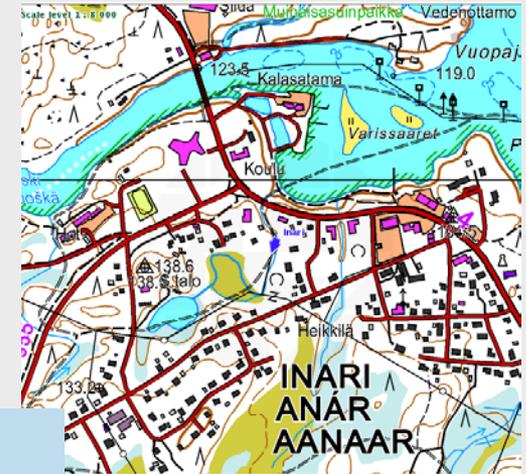


# Language and history – one name or more?



## Univocity

or multiple names  
to recognize  
language traditions?



Mount Taranaki or  
Mount Egmont



Mackenzie River  
has 7  
official names



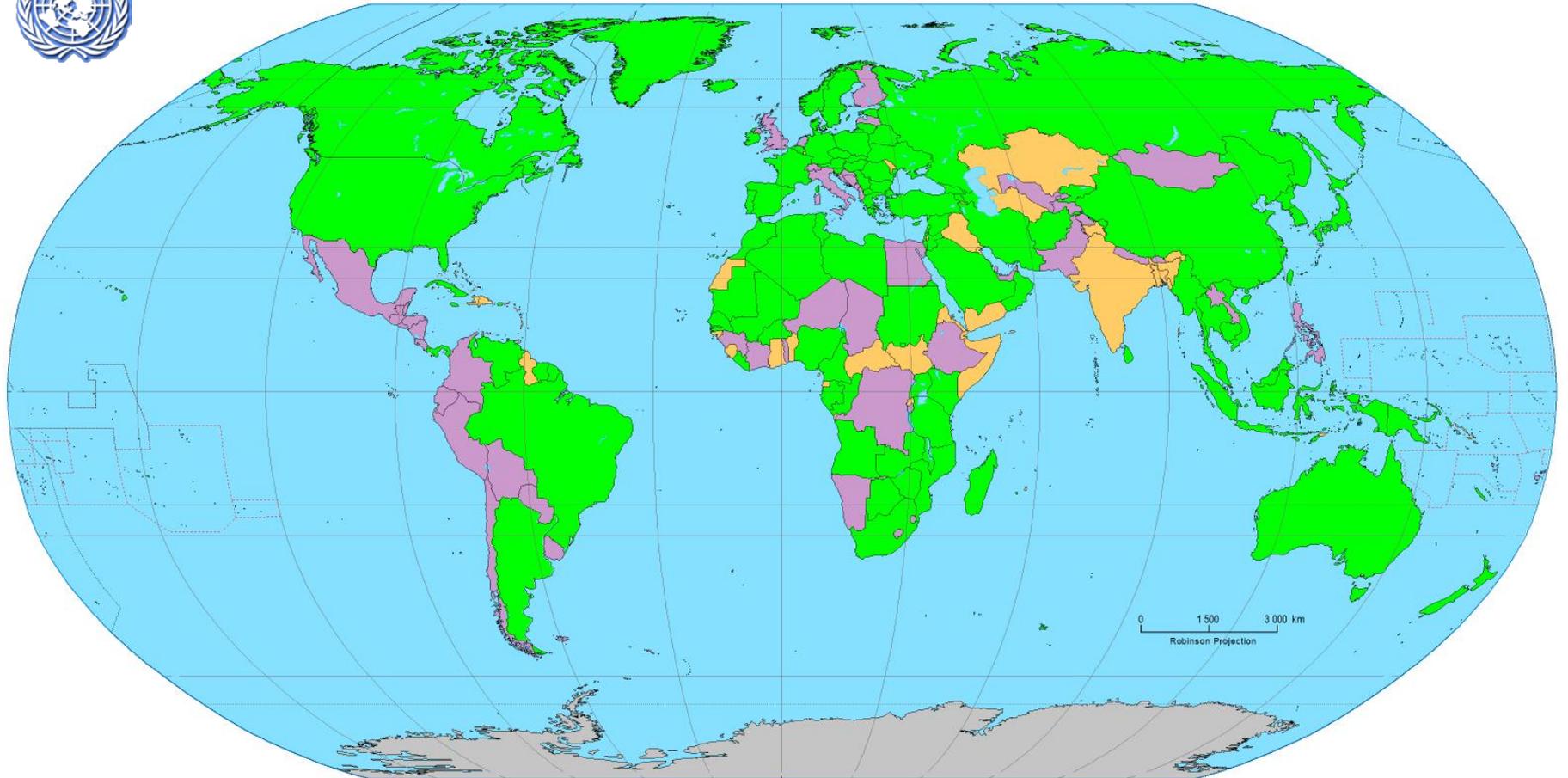
Aoraki/Mount Cook

# Time sequence of names authorities

- Historically many lists of place names (e.g. explorers' maps)
- Early boards
  - USA 1890
  - Denmark 1910
  - New Zealand 1946
  - Canada 1897
  - Iceland 1935
  - Ireland 1946
- **Now ~ 80 countries have national authorities**
- Most recent:
  - 2013 - Saudi Arabia, Burkina Faso, Tunisia
  - 2010 - Sri Lanka, Denmark - Føroyar
  - 2009 - Mozambique, Afghanistan, Serbia, Brazil
- *Although established by law*
  - *some boards are non-functional*



# Geographical Names Authorities (01/2015)



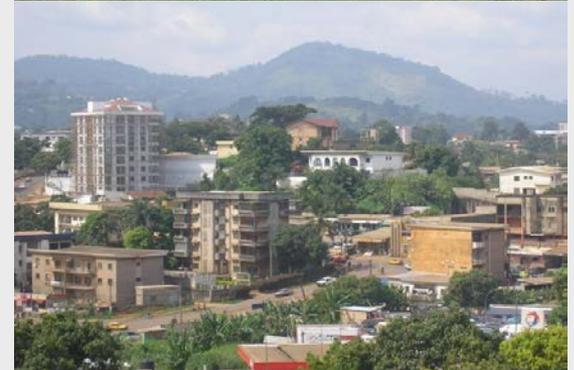
**■ With national names authorities**

**■ No national names authorities**

**■ Status unknown**

# What is important

?





# Benefits of standardized names?

## Technical benefits

e.g. Mapping / GIS  
Information management

## Social benefits

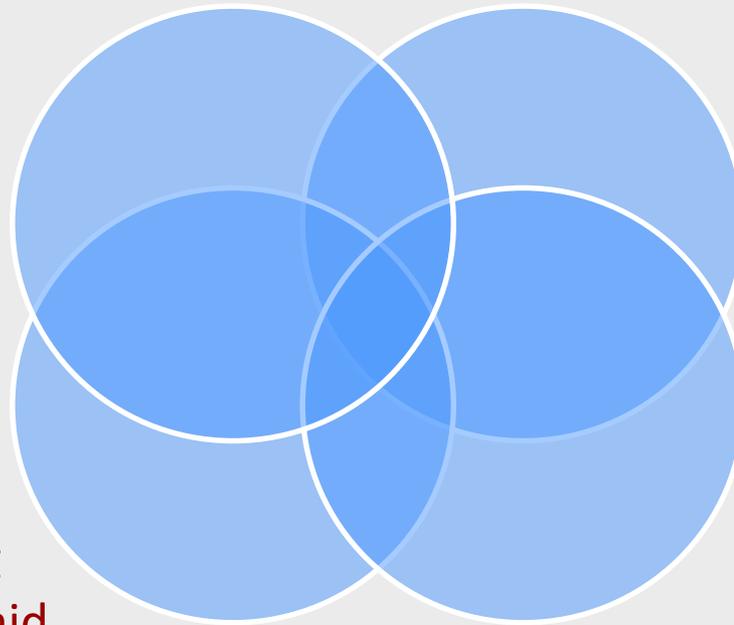
e.g. Urban planning  
Humanitarian aid  
Search and rescue

## Economic benefits

e.g. Infrastructure  
Tourism promotion  
Delivery services

## Cultural benefits

e.g. Recording history  
Language retention  
Identity





# Lack of standardized data ...

- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)
  - Earthquake in Pakistan, 2005
    - delays in providing assistance to remote villages
    - difficult to obtain - standardized names, coordinates of villages, gazetteers, population statistics, maps





# Data or scrambled eggs?

Here, there or where?



**Duplication**

**Repetition**

**Lack of standardization**

**Incomplete data**

**Resources lost**

**Security compromised**

**Confusion**

**Bad decisions**

UNECA

# IHO & SCUFN

## International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) GEBCO Sub-Committee on Undersea Feature Names (SCUFN)



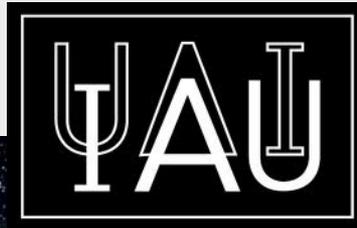
- IHO coordinating activities
- no decisions on ocean names, but influence through publications
- *S-23 Limits of Oceans and Seas* (update 1953 edition)
- SCUFN – online gazetteer

<http://www.iho.int/srv1/>

# Beyond Earth - IAU

## International Astronomical Union (IAU)

### Working Group for Planetary System Nomenclature (WGPSN)



1919

- By early 1970s great interest in space exploration and features on the Moon and the planets
- 1973 – WGPSN – authorizes names
- *Gazetteer of Planetary Nomenclature* (USGS maintains online)

<http://www.iau.org>

<http://planetarynames.wr.usgs.gov>



# Continued need for standardized geographical names



*Thank you!*

