

ICA Fact Sheet # 2



National Borders in Cartography: ICA Policy and Scientific Principles

Purpose

The International Cartographic Association (ICA) promotes excellence in cartography and geographic information science through scientific collaboration, international standards, and responsible mapmaking. As an international scientific organisation and a member of the International Science Council (ISC), the ICA is committed to scientific neutrality and internationally accepted cartographic practices.

Maps do not simply depict geography—they also represent political and administrative realities. The depiction of international boundaries can have legal, diplomatic, and societal implications. Consequently, border representation requires careful adherence to internationally recognised standards and consistent cartographic practice.

1. ICA Principles

The ICA follows several fundamental principles when maps are produced under its auspices or within its official activities:

- **Scientific neutrality** – The ICA does not take political positions regarding territorial disputes or questions of sovereignty.
- **International consistency** – Border representations should follow internationally recognised reference sources and accepted international conventions whenever possible.

- **Transparency** – Where disputed boundaries exist, cartographers should clearly communicate the nature of the dispute through appropriate cartographic methods, legends, notes, or metadata.
- **Fitness for purpose** – The representation of borders should be appropriate to the map's purpose, scale, audience, and intended use.
- **Professional responsibility** – Cartographers should strive for accuracy, clarity, and fairness while avoiding misleading representations.

2. International Reference Framework

As an international scientific association, the ICA aligns its official activities with internationally recognised frameworks and practices, including those used throughout the United Nations system and other international organisations. This approach promotes consistency, interoperability, and scientific credibility while avoiding political advocacy.

3. National Mapping Authorities

The ICA recognises that National Mapping Authorities (NMAs) have statutory responsibilities within their respective jurisdictions and may produce official national mapping according to national legislation. Such products serve important governmental and legal functions.

ICA policy applies to the Association's own publications, conferences, exhibitions, educational activities, and other official outputs. The ICA respects national responsibilities while maintaining a consistent international scientific framework for its own activities.

4. Maps as Scientific Communication

Every map represents a series of informed design decisions. Border depiction should therefore be based on transparent, documented, and reproducible cartographic principles. Where multiple legitimate representations exist due to unresolved international situations, cartographers should clearly explain the chosen representation rather than presenting it as an unquestioned fact.

The ICA's Commitment

The ICA remains committed to:

- *promoting scientifically rigorous cartography;*
- *encouraging transparent and responsible mapmaking;*
- *supporting international cooperation;*
- *respecting internationally recognised standards and conventions;*
- *fostering dialogue among the global cartographic community.*

These principles help ensure that maps continue to serve as trusted instruments for scientific communication, education, decision-making, and international collaboration.

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