To: Mike Ksar
From: Mamady Doumbouya, President, N'ko Institute
Date: 11 January 2005
Re: N'Ko Proposal in Amendment 2

The purpose of this document is to answer some of the questions raised by the representatives of Canada concerning N'Ko proposal in Amendment 2.

Issue 1

1a - the English Block name contains an apostrophe, and the character names do not.
1b - Canada also requests that – to make it clear in the standard – that a paragraph / clause explaining the naming rules for Block Names be added.

Response 1

From the point of view of the N'Ko communities, we believe that all occurrences of the script name should have the same spelling of the word N'Ko throughout all the documents. We caution that N' is not the same N, and neither their translation or their use as argument in the N'Ko Language. When future N'Ko users start including them for example as search argument in environments like the internet when script is part of Unicode, the results of their use will be far different

We have been informed by the representative of Ireland and the sponsor of the proposal that the apostrophe is not an acceptable character in the English characters name rules. Nevertheless, we hope that this rule be waved to include the name N'Ko in the characters names. Since the characters names rules in French accept the apostrophe already, it will not be a far departure from the Unicode norms.

We are also requesting that the delegates review the English naming convention to prevent future confusion. In this era of long name elsewhere, an apostrophe in a language name should not stand in the way of proper name coding in the Unicode script.

Issue 2

2) The inclusion of the following characters:
- **a. 07E8 NKO LETTER OLD JA**
- **b. 07E9 NKO LETTER OLD CHA**
- **c. 07EA NKO LETTER OLD RA**

Response 2

We believe that it will be a disservice to 25 millions of Manden speakers to exclude 07E8 NKO LETTER OLD JA, 07E9 NKO LETTER OLD CHA, and 07EA NKO LETTER OLD RA.

The historical aspect these characters offered by the delegate from Ireland is very vital to the expression of the continuity of the script development. It is not the only reason for their retention as part of the character set to be included in Unicode.

The recommendation to change from these characters to the new ones by the script inventor Solomana Kante came at the later part of his writings, all the manuscripts including his (the vast majority not yet published) prior to that point are writing with the old letters. When the means to publish those books become available, it will be necessary to publish these manuscripts first with the old letters, if only for writing authenticity. In the

foreseeable future, publisher, researchers, and students, who will reproduce these manuscripts or other writings, will have the need to write with these characters. Furthermore, the letters will also be use as decorative characters in religious text in a manner not unfamiliar in other languages. As an example, Dr. Mamadi Baba Diane publisher of the holly Qur'an in N'Ko, had to explain in his preface how to use the new characters.

Furthermore, it is because of the expectation of current and future use of these original characters by the N'Ko users, that fonts are been created to allow them to readily write or display old documents. It is important that N'Ko users be giving a way to readily verify the authenticity of the prior writings, and translations, especially in religious books that have now been rewritten with the new form. The retention is also necessary not only because the transition period is so recent, but like Roman numerals in Latin base writings the characters cannot be readily ignored because other replacement are available. The N'Ko virtual keyboard currently in use includes these characters. Whenever a permanent N'Ko keyboard is created as result of N'Ko inclusion in Unicode these characters will be included.

Issue 3

3) Some of the proposed nko combining marks have identical shape and canonical combining class to already encoded marks (07EB, 07ED, 07EE...)

Response 3

Combining Characters Above or Under the Letters:

> 3a - There are much more important and necessary issues that are indispensable to the N'Ko Language and its Script that can translate the characters into the image of the Language itself. For instance, the need to have a contiguous character set available to it users in the writing system without refer backs. Not to imply that some of the characters are secondary characters or not part of N'Ko character set but merely borrowed from other systems.
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> 3b – The use and the frequency of use of the Combining Characters in the system itself is done through the use of Eight (8) Combining Diacriticals. Vowels can be pronounced in Sixteen (16) tones Styles. When used with the consonants, they derivate other consonants and sounds that extend the set without creating additional characters for current needs and future use.
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> 3c – These Combining Characters also have an additional function of unifying the writing of the Manden branches and sub-branches into one writing system. Consequently, they reduce the amount of localization required for each branch and sub-branch. As an example, the 07F2 NKO COMBINING KANNADIYALAN is not merely a nasalization mark but a unifying symbol between branches to reduce dialectic variations. The coding integration between Bamanan and Maninka branches are good examples. Unlike the way they are used in other systems N'Ko depends more heavily on these characters to express tones and to integrate the branch coding with higher frequency than in other systems.

We understand the goals of unifying the diacritics but at what future cost to the N'Ko users. We submit therefore that to require the N'Ko system to hunt for it characters in the other parts of the Unicode or to superimpose other diacritics will be for N'Ko users an error of expediency of proportion similar to the one that assigned two positions instead of four to the calendar year prior to the year 2000.