

# Proposal to add an annotation to BATAK LETTER KARO BA \*

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## 1 Introduction

The Batak script is used to write a variety of languages within the Batak subfamily of the Austronesian language family in northern Sumatra. Each variety uses a slightly different subset of the code points encoded within the Batak block of the Unicode Standard.

When the Batak script was first encoded into Unicode, the Toba Batak language represented the syllable /ba/ with the code point U+1BC5 BATAK LETTER BA (𐌵), a letter with a slight ‘kidney bean’ shape. In October, 02022, the first Toba Batak Congress decided to switch to using an oval-shaped character to represent /ba/<sup>1</sup>. Thankfully, the Karo Batak language already uses an oval-shaped /ba/, encoded as U+1BC6 BATAK LETTER KARO BA (𐌶), which can be utilized for Toba Batak’s new form.

## 2 Request

- This proposal requests the addition of a code chart annotation to the following code point:

- U+1BC6 𐌶 BATAK LETTER KARO BA

as follows:

- also used in Toba

## 3 Justification

The existing name of the code point BATAK LETTER KARO BA implies that it is strictly used for Karo. As Toba now uses this character shape, an annotation will assist font designers and input method implementers.

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\*This proposal is based on research by Benny Lin and Simon Cozens.

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<sup>1</sup>“Bentuk induk surat 𐌵 ‘ba’ perlu dipertimbangkan untuk menjadi bulat lonjong 𐌶 ‘ba’, karena ini yang lebih banyak di naskah”

“The letter 𐌵 ‘ba’ needs to be considered to be rounded oval 𐌶 ‘ba’, because this is the one that is more common in manuscripts.”

## 4 Alternative Encoding Possibilities

Other possibilities that have been proposed include continuing to represent Toba /ba/ with U+1BC5 BATAK LETTER BA, relying on font technology to render it as an oval in Toba environments. This has the benefit of automatically switching existing Toba documents to using the new shape approved by the Toba Batak Congress, and means Toba users do not have to use a code point with KARO in the name. However, it also can easily cause visual confusion with the now-visually-identical U+1BC6 BATAK LETTER KARO BA, will make it impossible to represent Toba documents with the ‘kidney bean’ BA for faithfulness to older documents or for users that prefer the previous orthography.

## 5 Sources

- IPMINEWS.CO.ID. “Rumusan Hari Ketiga Kongres I Kebudayaan Batak Toba pada 22 Oktober 2022” (<http://web.archive.org/web/20230714062818/https://www.ipminews.co.id/rumusan-hari-ketiga-kongres-i-kebudayaan-batak-toba-pada-22-oktober-2022/>)