



UNITED NATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION

**2010 World Programme
on Population and Housing Census
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Opening Statement

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Dear colleagues,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the United Nations. I am delighted to have this opportunity to address such a distinguished gathering of census statisticians from all over the world.

This is the first in a series of meetings that we expect to host following the endorsement of the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Census by the Statistics Commission and the ECOSOC. As such, it sets the stage for future meetings and provides an important opportunity for us to shape the 2010 census round at this early stage. We note, with much appreciation, that at this early phase of the 2010 World Programme, national statistical offices are already actively participating in the discussion on international standards and that in most regions of the world activities are under way to facilitate and enhance this exchange of opinions. We are thankful for the support. We see this meeting as a continuation of this discourse at the global level and are committed to follow it up efficiently to maintain the momentum.

As you know, the World Programme on Population and Housing Census has a long history. It first started almost fifty years ago, in 1958, and its long standing contribution to the global statistical infrastructure is well known. The 2004 Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics, for example, has recognized this and included the preparation for 2010 census as one of its key recommendations. At this stage, it is worth repeating the goals of the World Programme. These goals are:

Goal 1: Conducting at least one population and housing census in every country or area in the period 2005-2014;

Goal 2: Producing an updated version of United Nations Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses;

Goal 3: Providing a platform for comprehensive exchange of experiences, countries' participation, technical assistance, information and data dissemination.

The United Nations Statistics Division, as the secretariat of the 2010 World Programme, is committed to ensure its implementation. Our efforts are backed by national statistical offices and international bodies, such as the World Bank and UNFPA. Based on the experiences of the 2000 round of censuses, especially the positive outcomes of regional synergetic processes that benefited all the countries involved, we are now placing special emphasis on the regional and sub-regional cooperation. To this end, a strategy is being developed whereby regional and sub-regional organizations are encouraged and supported in starting to plan cooperative census activities.

Advocating for population and housing censuses is invariably an area that needs special attention, especially given the fact that in some regions of the world a considerable number of countries or areas did not conduct a population and/or housing census in the previous round of censuses. For example, the United Nations *Demographic Yearbook* indicates that 16 countries, home to 43% of total population of Africa did not conduct a census for the past ten years. Thus the importance of advocacy and in an attempt to motivate as many sponsors at national and international level as possible, we are working with World Bank and UNFPA to raise the awareness of the need to conduct population and housing censuses.

This meeting will discuss very important issues on the principles and standards on the conduct of population and housing census. I must say that, while the spirit of census-taking remains unchanged, we are witnessing significant innovations in census technology and methodology. The innovations are forcing us to re-examine some of our old beliefs and practices. This critical re-examination is the key to progress as we modernize our statistical systems and processes.

However, it is important to realize that the revised set of recommendations that we are formulating here needs to be clear and unambiguous and provides guidelines that all the nations can follow. The revised set of recommendations for population and housing censuses should identify and recommend a set of statistics that need to be produced at the lowest geographical level for the same point in time for a nation to be

able to meet its development goals, economic and social requirements, business needs and international comparison and monitoring. The majority of national statistical authorities use a population census as the single most comprehensive vehicle to collect these necessary statistics. A population census could reach the households of a country in person, by mail, or the Internet and asking questions. A population census could also be based on registers, that is, linking different registers and generating complete census tabulations. In essence, our recommendations would have to refer to a set of output tabulations for the smallest administrative/geographical level and for the same date which would be considered as the key product of a population and housing census.

At this stage, it is worthy to re-iterate the crucial importance of the four essential features of a population census: individual enumeration, universality, simultaneity and periodicity. These features are vital in ensuring to the fullest extent possible the usefulness, indeed uniqueness, of a census: small area statistics and producing a master sample frame for all other statistical surveys.

As for the alternative approaches to the census that we are witnessing at the moment, the United Nations *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* must, by definition, remain open-ended and open-minded when it comes to different methods and developments in the statistical practice world-wide; as an international standard they also have an immense responsibility to recommend those practices that have been tested repeatedly and successfully. I would have difficulty in accepting, within the definition of a population census, a technique that moves away from the current set of essential features especially where it becomes impossible to generate the small area and benchmark data.

Later today we will be presenting papers that address the definition of a census and a proposed outline of the revised set of recommendations. We will present the list of core topics. We will have an opportunity to hear about the impressive work done in the working groups as well as the exchange of opinions at the Interactive Discussion Forum for the 2010 World Programme. We will learn on what transpired in regional discussions.

Thus, I would encourage you to debate these issues in smallest details, to deliberate on their significance and values to the users and stakeholders and to determine the shape of the forthcoming round of censuses.

At the end of these five days, we expect to achieve the following major goals:

- An agreed definition of the population and housing census.
- General outline of the revised set of *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* that include areas that are not currently covered, such as outsourcing, for example
- The list of topics and identifying of core topics

Let me conclude by expressing my appreciation for your presence and commitment to international statistics and to wish you a successful and meaningful meeting.