



WESTERN ASIA WORKSHOP ON STRATEGIES FOR ACCELERATING THE IMPROVEMENT  
OF CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS SYSTEMS  
20 -24 JUNE 1993, DAMASCUS



حلقة عمل غربي آسيا بشأن اعتماد استراتيجيات لتسريع بتحسين  
نظم التسجيل المدني والاحصاءات الحيوية  
٢٠ - ٢٤ حزيران/يونيو ١٩٩٣، دمشق

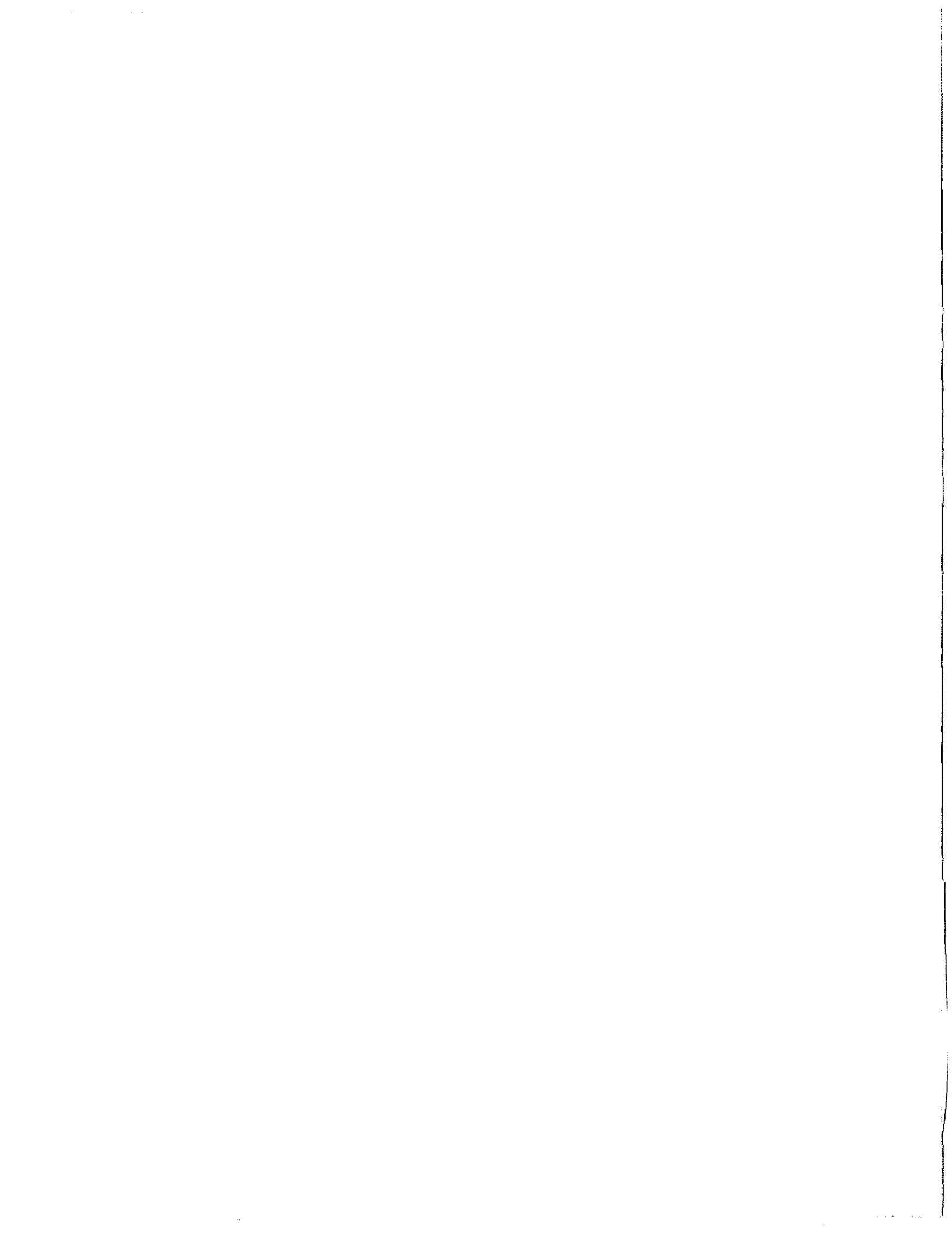
المكتب المركزي للإحصاء  
CENTRAL BUREAU OF  
STATISTICS

اللجنة الاقتصادية والاجتماعية لغربي آسيا  
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION  
FOR WESTERN ASIA

شعبة الاحصاء في الامم المتحدة  
STATISTICAL DIVISION  
UNITED NATIONS

## REPORT OF THE WORKSHOP

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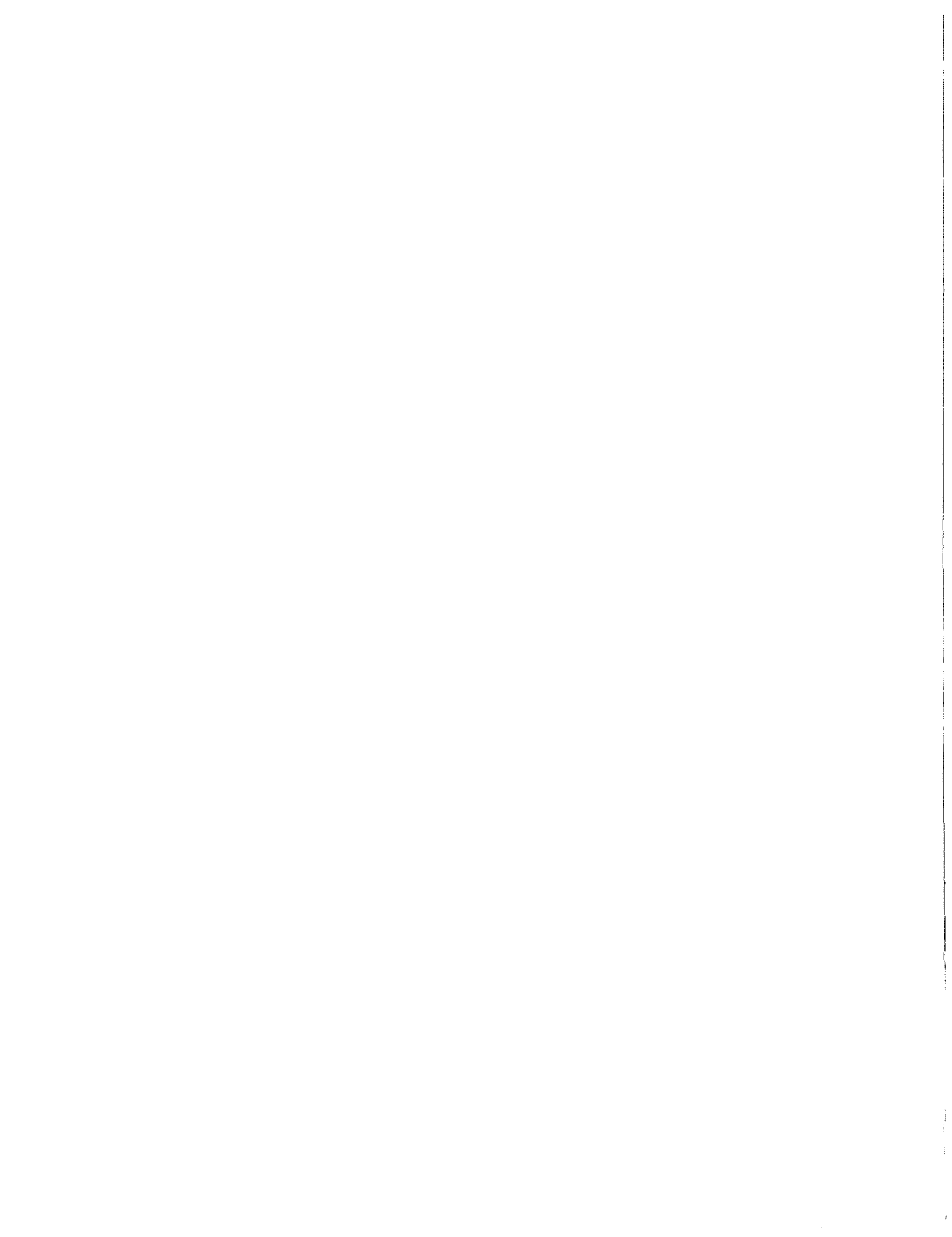
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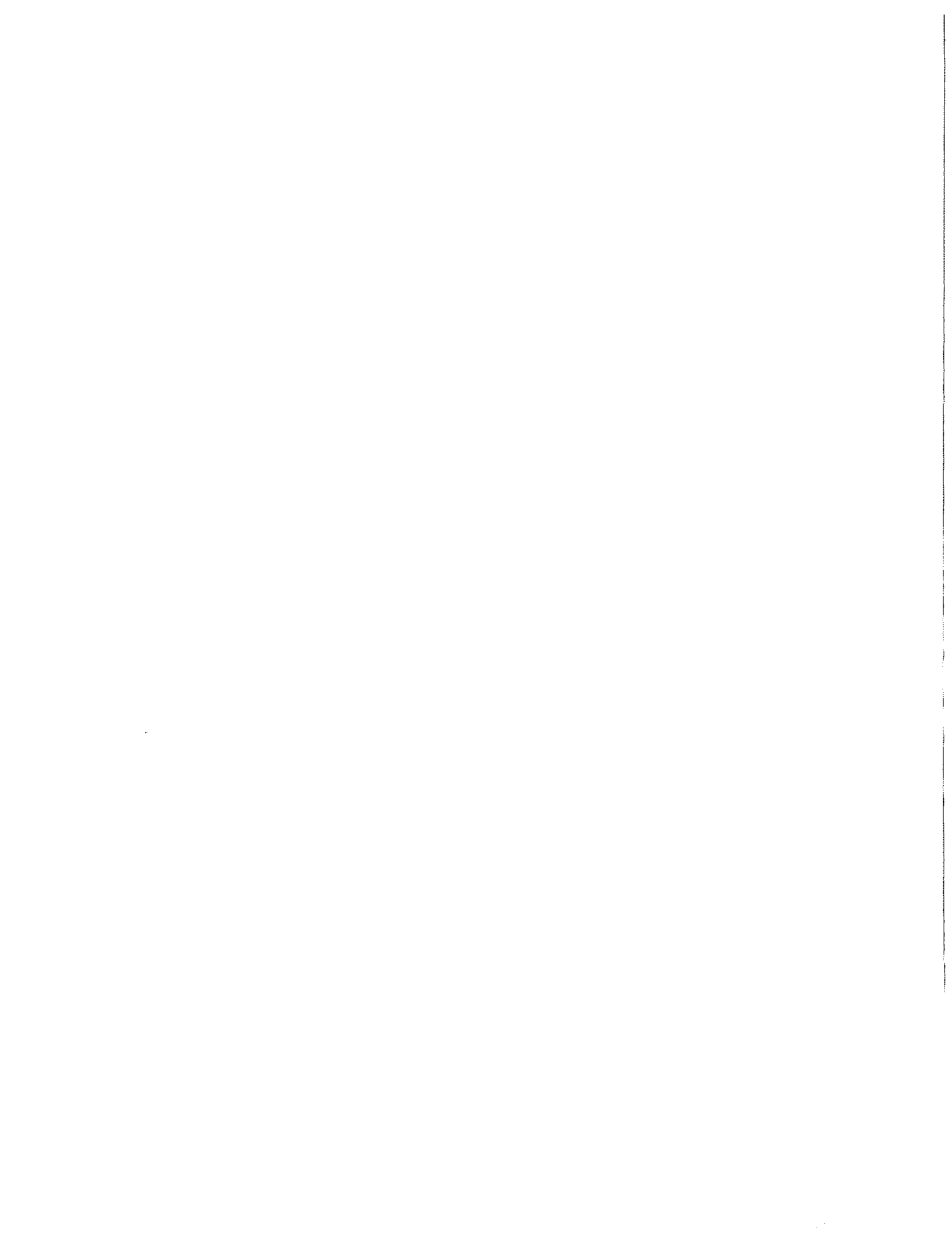
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**REPORT OF THE WESTERN ASIA WORKSHOP ON STRATEGIES FOR  
ACCELERATING THE IMPROVEMENT OF CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL  
STATISTICS SYSTEMS**

Damascus, Syria  
20 to 24 June 1993

**I. INTRODUCTION**

**1. Background information**

It is universally recognized that well managed, maintained and operated civil registration and vital statistics systems serve a wide variety of purposes. For example, an important purpose of the systems is to serve as a permanent and continuing source of statistics of live births, deaths, foetal deaths, marriages, divorces and the like, in order to monitor the natural population growth, variations of the structure, composition and distribution of the population. They also provide the legal grounds for certification of the occurrence of births, marriages, divorces, deaths which are needed by the members of the society in order to comply with the country's legal and administrative requirements.

In order to encourage and assist countries to carry out improvements in their civil registration and vital statistics systems, an International Programme for Accelerating the Improvement of Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems was developed jointly by the United Nations Statistical Division, the United Nations Population Fund, the World Health Organization and the International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics. The Programme was endorsed by the United Nations Statistical Commission at its Twenty-sixth session held in New York in February 1991.

As part of its implementation, *inter alia*, a series of workshops are being organized by the United Nations Statistical Division in close cooperation with the United Nations regional commissions. The first workshop was carried out in Buenos Aires, Argentina from 2 to 6 December 1991. Eleven Latin American countries participated. Another is in preparation for countries of Eastern and Southern Asia from 29 November to 3 December 1993 and will be hosted by the Government of the Peoples' Republic of China.

The Western Asia Workshop on Strategies for Accelerating the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems is the second of a series and was carried out in Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic from 20 to 24 June 1993. It was organized by the United

Nations Statistical Division (UNSTAT) in close cooperation and collaboration with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). The United Nations Population Fund provided financial support for the workshop which was supplemented by funds from ESCWA. The workshop was hosted by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic under the auspices of the Prime Minister's Office. The Central Bureau of Statistics and the Ministry of Interior of Syria have assumed the responsibility jointly with UNSTAT and ESCWA for the implementation of the workshop.

## 2. Purposes and objectives

The main objectives of the Western Asia Workshop were:

- (a) To assess the adequacy of national civil registration and vital statistics processes coverage and reliability ;
- (b) To suggest strategies for the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics in the participating countries;
- (c) To discuss ways and means of promoting the awareness of national civil registration and vital statistics systems in each participating country.

To that end, the workshop discussed the following:

- (a) Current status of the national civil registration and vital statistics systems in each participating country, including the existing technical facilities, resources and the problems encountered to operate these systems on a daily basis.
- (b) The role of vital statistics and civil registration systems in participating countries for various uses and applications;
- (c) Strategies for solving the problems of the systems on a one by one approach in order to promote their development and improvement, bearing in mind the availability of modern technology;
- (d) The elements required for a national programme of activities, in the short and medium term, for sub-national improvement of the system, with the priority objective of increasing the coverage in the registration of vital events.
- (e) The forms of technical cooperation between international, regional and non governmental agencies in support of the national plan of action to improve the systems.



### 3. Recommendations of the Workshop

The workshop adopted the following recommendations:

1. The establishment and development of civil registration and vital statistics systems in countries and areas of ESCWA region that have not adopted these systems yet, and improving those in existence, benefiting from the experiences of other countries in the region and from those more advanced countries. For this purpose countries should review all relevant legislation and regulations, *inter alia*.
2. Establishing national committees on civil registration and vital statistics in each one of the ESCWA countries or areas to exercise the authority of designing plans of work and strategies concerning the establishment and development of the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems from the organizational, administrative and technical viewpoints, and consolidation of co-operation and co-ordination among competent authorities.
3. Calling upon ESCWA countries and areas to form a high level regional committee in the field of civil registration and vital statistics, to be assigned with offering and facilitating the exchange of experience and information in these fields. (The hosting country of this workshop should invite this committee to hold its first meeting, in order to set up regulations defining its tasks and functions).
4. Consulting the International Programme for Accelerating the Improvement of Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems, in order to ~~draw~~ relevant national plans of work, taking into consideration: *develop*
  - a. the automation of the activities of civil registration and vital statistics;
  - b. reliance on the civil registration records as main sources of vital statistics, benefiting therefrom in the fields of planning, programming, research and assessment;
  - c. focusing on the training of personnel working in the fields of civil registration and vital statistics on the use of the most modern means in this field, raising the standard of their efficiency and providing them with incentives and privileges;
  - d. protection of civil registration data, since it has great importance in the lives of individuals and society, and safeguarding its secrecy and safety;

- e. benefiting from the output of an experimental project on a limited scale, in order to assess and rectify the stages of implementation on a larger scale;
  - f. taking measures necessary to secure the highest degree of comprehensiveness in registration, particularly through the promotion of statistical awareness, simplification of registration procedures and setting up increasing numbers of registration offices; and
  - g. stressing the importance and necessity of monitoring the causes of death in certificates reporting death events.
5. The increase of financial and technical contributions by regional and international organizations and developed countries in this field, with the aim of improving civil registration and vital statistics systems, particularly in countries with urgent needs;
  6. Calling upon ESCWA to play a prominent role in the provision of information and technical expertise in areas concerning civil registration and vital statistics systems to ESCWA member states or areas.
  7. Enabling the Palestinian Arab people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to obtain accurate and comprehensive data about vital and demographic statistics therein.
  8. Requesting the United Nations through the appropriate channels to assign an international year (between 1993 and 2 000) as the year of civil registration and vital statistics.
  9. Calling upon the countries that have not submitted a comprehensive assessment of the situation of their civil registration and vital statistics to work on a reassessment of their situation according to the document entitled "Review and Assessment of the National System of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics"(WAW/CRVS/93/6), in order to facilitate the introduction of necessary reforms.

#### **4. Workshop participants**

The following ESCWA member states or areas participated in the workshop: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Sultanate of Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, the United Arab Emirates and the Republic of Yemen. Other participants in the workshop included representatives from Argentina, Denmark and the United States of America as well as from the World Health Organization-Geneva, the WHO-Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, the United Nations Population Fund Country Support Team in Amman, the Cairo Demographic Centre, and the International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics.

All ESCWA member states and areas were invited by the United Nations Statistical Division to nominate two representatives, one from the office responsible for the civil registration work and the other from the office that compiles vital statistics. The country representatives should be senior officials of the government who have the technical knowledge and extensive experience with the systems.

The invitations were sent out through the directors of the central statistics bureaus of the countries and areas concerned. The directors were also requested to coordinate the preparation of the national report that the two representatives should prepare for the workshop. At the same time, all Resident Representatives of the United Nations Development Programme of the participating countries were informed about the preparatory work for the workshop and were requested to assist by forwarding the country nominations to the United Nations headquarters for processing. The UNDP Resident Representatives have also made administrative arrangements for round trip travel of country participants between their country and Damascus to attend the workshop.

The two official representatives of each country were requested to present a comprehensive report on the current status of the national civil registration and vital statistics systems, including the roles of those systems for various purposes. They also had to make an evaluation of the system in all their phases, with a view to indicating precisely what the problems were. Furthermore, they were requested to suggest strategies that had to be implemented for overcoming the obstacles found in the diagnosis, so that the systems could efficiently achieve the purposes for which they have been designed.

A total of 81 participants attended. There were 26 official country representatives, 28 observers from the Syrian Arab Republic, 18 experts from other countries outside the ESCWA region, International and regional organizations, and nine members of the local organizing committee. The list of participants (WAW/CRVS/93/2) is attached as Annex No.2 to this report.

## **5. Administrative aspects of the workshop**

All sessions of the workshop were held at the main Conference Hall of the Cham Palace Hotel in Damascus from 20 to 24 June 1993, inclusive.

The main language of the workshop was Arabic. Simultaneous interpretation was provided into English and Arabic during the five-day workshop sessions.

In preparation of the workshop, a mission was carried out by a staff member of the United Nations Statistical Division to the headquarters of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in Amman, Jordan, back in October 1992 to seek the cooperation of ESCWA, outline the plan for the workshop, select the host country and the countries to be invited to participate.

After Damascus was selected as the conference site, Dr. Labeeb Abdunnur, Chief of Statistics Division, ESCWA contacted Dr. Ibrahim Ali, Director-General of the Central Bureau of Statistics, Syria on the proposed dates (20 to 24 June 1993) and site of the workshop. Dr. Ali welcomed the proposal and graciously offered to make CBS facilities available for the workshop, including conference room, personal computers, overhead projector, etc.

Once the site of the workshop was confirmed, two other preparatory missions were carried out by a staff member of the Statistics Division, ESCWA to Damascus, Syria to hold further discussions with the concerned Syrian authorities regarding all necessary administrative needs for the successful conduct of the workshop in Damascus.

In addition to the resources provided by UNSTAT, the Statistics Division of ESCWA appointed six members to service the workshop and paid the cost of travel and stay of its staff in Damascus, printing and reproduction of documents, translation of technical papers from English to Arabic, stationary for the workshop, stands for the conference room, posters, banners, badges, executive handbags for documents, cafeteria between workshop sessions and hospitality.

## **6. Workshop Local Organizing Committee**

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic nominated a Local Organizing Committee for the workshop to assist the United Nations Statistical Division and ESCWA in carrying various matters relating to the workshop in Damascus. The committee members from the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) were as follows:

**Committee Chairman:** Mr. Safouh Hatahet, Director, Planning and Technical Cooperation Directorate,

**Committee members:**

- Mr. Samir Abou Hajar, Director, Administrative and Financial Directorate
- Mr. Taleb Zeitonn, Secretary, Secretariat Directorate
- Miss Helene Haddad, Planning and Technical co-operation Directorate

- Mrs. Nizhat Sanadiki, Planning and Technical co-operation Directorate
- Mrs. Sahar Younghone, Planning and Technical co-operation Directorate
- Ms. Sumaia Saad Al Deen, Planning and Technical co-operation Directorate
- Mr. Mahmoud Al-Shayeb, Equipment manager
- Mr. Aizeldin Suleiman, Public Relations

The Central Bureau of Statistics and the Ministry of Interior of the Syrian Arab Republic provided the conference room, the secretarial and support personnel in the conference hall, assistance in obtaining hotel reservations and the issuing of visas to external participants, document reproduction facilities, typewriters, overhead projector, personal computers, sound equipment, facilities for use in the simultaneous interpretation, local transportation for the participants to and from the airport, hospitality for the participants, extensive media coverage, etc.

## II. ACTIVITIES OF THE WORKSHOP

### 1. Opening ceremony

The official opening of the workshop took place on Sunday 20 June 1993 at the main Conference Hall of the Cham Palace Hotel in Damascus at 10 O'clock in the morning. The opening ceremony was attended by a number of high level officials, including Ministers of the Syrian Government, diplomats from the participating countries, officials of the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Population Fund in Syria, University Deans, Mayors and representatives from Women and Farmers Unions.

On behalf of the United Nations Statistical Division (UNSTAT), Dr. Y.C.Yu, Chief of the Demographic and Social Statistics Branch, UNSTAT welcomed the participants, referred to the main purposes of the workshop and pointed out the importance of it in the context of the International Programme for Accelerating the Improvement of Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems.

Next, Mr. Sabah Bakjaji, Under-Secretary General, Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia welcomed the participants and stressed the importance of the civil registration and vital statistics systems for both the individual and the society. He praised the close cooperation of the United Nations Statistical Division, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic for the organization and implementation of the workshop and urged countries to implement the recommendations that will emerge after deliberations in the workshop.

On behalf of Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and of the Prime Minister, his Excellency Mr. Mohammad Harba, Minister of Interior, officially opened the workshop. He expressed his appreciation to the United Nations agencies involved in the organization of the workshop for selecting Damascus as the site of the workshop. He then referred to the importance of maintaining a well organized civil registration and vital statistics system for the planning of economic and social development in Syria and recognized the urgent need for carrying out reforms in both the civil registration and vital statistics systems in Syria and expressed the readiness of the Government to set out plans to improve the systems.

## 2. First session: The International Programme

At the start of the first session, Dr. Ibrahim Ali, Director-General of the Central Bureau of Statistics of the Syrian Arab Republic, was elected Chairman of the workshop and General Ibrahim Ibrahim Bossylah, Director-General of Civil Status Organization, Egypt, was elected Rapporteur of the Workshop. Next, the workshop agenda (WAW/CRVS/93/1 add. 2) was adopted (Annex No. 1).

The representative of the United Nations Statistical Division (Mrs. Violeta Gonzales-Diaz) briefed participants on the goals, objectives, main features, and proposed activities of the International Programme for Accelerating the Improvement of Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems (WAW/CRVS/93/4), and the immediate and long-term objectives of the programme and the activities provided for in the programme of work for the next four years. She pointed out that the International Programme offered a unique opportunity to motivate countries to design and implement their own national plan of reforms, with a nationwide scope, to upgrade the current performance of civil registration and vital statistics systems. The programme also tends to eliminate duplication of work on the part of different international and regional organizations.

She further stressed that any national plan of reforms should be based on an in-depth study of the current situation of the systems in the concerned country in order to determine accurately the problems that should be given priority for attention and solution, bearing in mind the human, financial and other resources available in the countries, as well as the existing political climate. Furthermore, such reform programmes should be given economic support by the countries' own governments, owing to the permanent and continuous nature of the systems in question. Because of the nature of the civil registration and vital statistics systems, it is foreseen that the Statistics Division in ESCWA will play an important role in assisting countries of the region that may wish to initiate a plan of action to streamline their systems.

In order to ensure the reforms yielded positive results, the national program should inter alia take account of the needs of both the users and the producers of civil registration and vital statistics. The national programme could be achieved through the formation of a national committee of representatives of the agencies responsible for civil registration and vital statistics, including, for example, the ministries of health, interior, identification of the population services and the like.

### 3. Second session: National Reports

Participants then began the discussion of the country reports on the Status of the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems in countries and areas of the ESCWA region (list of documents in Annex 3) (WAWCRVS/93/3).

The representatives from the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (Mr. Fahad Abdel Fatah Suliman Al-Najdawi and Mr. Nasri Abdul-Raheem Al-Shamayli) informed that Jordan registers all vital events on a compulsory basis. The law stipulates that the registration of all live births be made, even if the newborn survived for one moment, thus adjusting to the international recommended definitions. The Department of Passports and Civil Status was established in 1966 with the purpose of registering all citizens in civil registration records, the issuance of personal documents and the registration of marriages and divorces, including all related certificates. In addition, the Department registers deaths and births and issues the relevant certificates. The Department maintains several offices (62 as of 1993) in each governorate to facilitate registration of citizens, which report to the main office in Amman. The problem, however, lies with the registration of foetal deaths as there is no special form for recording them. The authorities require that for a foetal death, a birth certificate be filled out first and then the death certificate be issued.

Furthermore, the Department in Jordan is making efforts to improve its services by computerizing its operations and assigning a national number to every registered civilian citizen. In addition, the Department has simplified the procedures for obtaining required documents within a short period of time, delegated authority to directors of governorate offices, conducted training courses for its staff and organized field trips to register citizens in remote areas. Illegitimate newborns are also registered and included in vital statistics.

So far, Jordan is successful in the use of computers for civil registration purposes.

The processing and production of vital and social statistics such as births, deaths, marriages, divorces, are the sole responsibility of the Department of Statistics. The main shortcoming is the impossibility at the present time to extract detailed characteristics of vital events for statistical purposes, that would be useful in assessing the health situation, population growth and the like. This is due largely to the procedures adopted to enter the registration data into the computer at the Department of Passports and Civil Status, which prevent the production of detailed vital statistics because no coding of variables has been made. Thus, what have been tabulated falls under the category of



aggregates and not according to age categories, or any other variables, for example.

The representatives of the United Arab Emirates (Mr. Mohamad Salah Shelwah and Mr. Majed Sultan) informed the participants that births and deaths are registered by the Ministry of Health, according to the 1975 law, which also states that there should be co-ordination with the Ministry of Planning, specifically with its Central Statistics Organization that should get copies of the records for vital statistical purposes. Regarding marriages and divorces, registration is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Justice (Sharia courts), according to the Islamic law. Copies of these records are also sent to the Central Statistics Organization for statistical purposes. Among the various problems pointed out, they stated that the system is manual, does not have efficient registrars, and has delays in the registration of vital events, especially marriages and divorces. Furthermore, under-registration of births and deaths is still significantly large due to the population unawareness, they do not understand the importance of registration records and statistics. U.A.E

The representative of Saudi Arabia (Mr. Abdullah M. Al-Sagr) informed the participants that the Kingdom has no law compelling citizens to register marriages, although other administrative needs may force citizens to register them. A family booklet is issued, which records information about marriage and the number of wives and children, according to the Islamic Shari'a Code. SA

The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic (Mr. Ahmad Hilal) informed the workshop that the civil registration system in Syria has all the basic data needed for generating vital statistics according to internationally recommended tabulations. However, they lack computers to process statistics. The way the civil registration files are kept also makes it difficult, costly and time consuming to serve administrative purposes such as the preparation of electoral rolls, or issuing of identity cards and the like. In fact, the civil registration of Syria is still manually operated. However, the Department of Civil Registration in Syria is now in the process of gradually introducing computer facilities in its civil registration system. Such technology would enable Syria to prepare, disseminate and use the data quickly and in a more efficient way. The new direction being undertaken to automate civil registration functions relies on the assistance and collaboration of ESCWA and the United Nations Population Fund. Syria aspires to implement this project completely in all governorates. It was stressed that this new technical approach needs a new programme; additional equipment; the training of personnel; inputs from other countries; guidelines and orientations of the International Programme of Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems and so forth. Syria

The registration system, at present, attaches no importance to a citizen's change of the place of residence. In fact, the law does not require anybody to report any changes of their place of residence. This information is obtained from the censuses where place of residence, whether current, usual or previous, are noted down precisely. However, it is hoped that the issue of place of residence be studied in the future for its inclusion in the civil registration system, in order to define the indicators of internal migration in a precise way through the civil registers. Data from population censuses and not civil registration are used to prepare development plans, since the Central Bureau of Statistics prepares population projections.

Civil registration in Syria is **family-based**. Each citizen has a family residence, registered in an entry under the extended family name or the place of residence. In this way, the address is linked to the name of the extended family and the nuclear families or members of such families. The link may also extend to the name of the quarter and the street. Therefore, linkage of the records is an important and essential topic in the organization of civil registers in Syria. The Directorate of Civil Status in Syria has prepared a study on how to reorganize civil registration in the event that computers were used. It was found out that a computer-based civil registration system would require the availability of a personal or national identifying number.

Dr. Ibrahim Ali, Director-General of the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) in Syria informed the participants that CBS worked in full co-ordination with the Department of Civil Registration of the Ministry of the Interior concerning all issues related to vital statistics, which are received regularly and continuously. The vital statistics system in Syria needs to be developed and improved because, all data were transcribed manually and only aggregate statistics can be published.

*Iraq*  
 The representatives of Iraq (Mr. Abdullah Hasan Mathi and Ms. Nuha Khudhur Yousif) stated that their country has a law for population registration that dates back to 1927. Although registration of live births and deaths started in 1949, the corresponding law was issued in 1971 and later amended and modified as needed. However, the system does not cover the whole country yet because of both the wide spread illiteracy among the population and also due to the fact that the registration facilities do not cover all areas of the country. The latter is confirmed by the estimate rate of registration coverage: 82 percent for live births and 61 percent for deaths.

*Oman*  
 The representative of Oman (Mr. Salem Hamed Salem Al-Tauqi) said that his country has no decision to create a civil registration system yet. However, early this year, a committee was formed under the responsibility of the Ministries of Health and

Interior, to establish procedures to register births and deaths. This arrangement will not include births occurring outside hospitals, unless the citizens concerned registered the newborn on a voluntary basis. Marriages and divorces, are carried out in courts but there is no official registration of these events. As no data from civil registration are available, estimates of current population growth and other basic demographic parameters are obtained from the demographic surveys carried out by the Development Council in collaboration with the United Nations. The Sultanate is preparing to carry out a general population and housing census towards the end of 1993 that will make available data on demographic, social and economic characteristics of the population.

The representative of Palestine (Mr. Yousif Al Madi), aspired to establish a national civil registration and vital statistics system in the occupied Palestinian territories. Towards this end, he requested ESCWA countries to provide the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics with the available vital statistics and demographic indicators related to Palestinian refugees. *Palestine*

The representatives of Lebanon (Mr. Adel Elias Choueri Chalhoub and Mr. Elie Michel Shehade) stated that the first law for registration of population, births and deaths was issued in 1924 and amended in 1951. Registration attained full coverage up to 1975 when the civil war started, although there were some delays at that time. From then on the situation of the systems have deteriorated but they expect some improvement as security in the country improves and also as a result of reforms introduced in birth and death certificates and other registration forms. *Lebanon*

The representatives of Qatar (Mr. Abdullah Ibrahim Mohamad Al-Emadi and Mr. Jamal Abdullah Al-Midfa) informed the participants that the first civil registration law for births and deaths was passed in 1982 and it is the responsibility of the Ministry for Public Health. Marriages and divorces are recorded following the Islamic law and is handled by the Ministry of Awkaf and Religious Affairs. Qatar has nearly complete birth and death registration as events are recorded as they occur, mostly in hospitals in the two major urban areas that constitute about 84 percent of the total population. They also ascertained that there are civil registration units that cover the whole country. *Qatar*

The representatives of Kuwait (Mohamad Hussein-Al-Omar and Mr. Issa Mohammad Al-Rashid) stated that registration is fully computerized in their country and is family-based. Information covers first: the head of the family as well as all residents in the housing unit, then marital data, then the sons, followed by all individuals resident with the family or linked by kinship or residence within the housing units. A code is given to each individual specifying his relationship to the rest of the *Kuwait*

household. Completeness of registration is checked for all individuals of the household who reside in the housing unit. This is considered as the complete address of all members of the household. Nationality and residence details for non Kuwait nationals are recorded and can be presented in a series of logical relations. Since a civil registration number becomes available right from the start, a follow up of vital events becomes easy and simple.

In regard to completeness of registration, Kuwait reported a nearly 100 percent coverage for births and deaths. Furthermore, data on population are updated on a daily basis, thus vital and population statistics can be provided on a very short notice. However, no data may be issued, except through the Central Statistical Office; the law has been amended to make CSO one of the official sources for issuing and disseminating information and vital statistical data. The public authority for Civil Information is the agency that extracts information and data concerning the civil status of the individual or citizen. The success on completeness of registration is attributable to incentives offered to the members of the society and to the simplicity of the procedures for registration. It was acknowledged that for other countries, rural and uneducated population poses problems that may require the creation of new registration centers in order to achieve comprehensive registration coverage.

Egypt  
\*  
The representatives of the Arab Republic of Egypt (Mr Ibrahim Ibrahim Bossylah and Mr. Gamal El-din Mahmoud Fangary) informed the meeting that their country is now moving from manual to automated methods, particularly in the field of civil registration. They explained that the current stage was transitional, pending the copying of all family records and issuing of identity cards using modern technology, and the enactment of laws compatible with automation. New cadres have been trained and supplementary registration centers allocated. These activities are framed in an important national project for the development of civil registration and vital statistics systems, which comprises training programmes, improvement of the collection of causes of death and data analysis through the use of personal computers, workshops, etc. The focus of this project is the development of an improved birth and death registration system and the build up of information centers. Finalized tables would be made available to serve the users of such data and a quarterly bulletin published for planning purposes.

In addition to the preparation of primary data-base programs, Egypt will review the question of comprehensiveness of birth and death registration by direct methods, which is now in the process of being implemented by the dual records-system. Several studies were carried out earlier to estimate the degree of registration completeness. The latest was undertaken in 1982 and showed that the

omission of birth registration had been 3 percent only, comprising mainly infants who died before they were registered. Omission for death registration has been estimated at 10 percent, which is still considered high.

In 1994, new procedures set up for civil registration will be adopted. These will be computer-based and organized with the assistance of index-numbers which a person will carry for life. Egypt has recently received advice from a team of experts from Denmark for this purpose.

The representatives of the Republic of Yemen (Mr. Ahmed Ali Al-Sanabani and Mr. Hamood Ahmed Al-Asari) stated that, after the reunification of the country, they are in the process of consolidating its civil registration and vital statistics systems. A new law has already been passed in 1991 and is now working to implement this law and to standardize procedures for civil registration and vital statistics reporting nationwide, with cooperation from UNFPA. Currently, emphasis is being placed in six areas of the country through the demonstration area approach.

*Yemen*

The presentation of country reports offered quite a clear picture of the state of the art in civil registration and vital statistics in the region, from the registration of vital events and statistical processes to the dissemination of data for socio-economic development planning and other purposes. However, the extent of the comprehensiveness of registration of births and deaths in some of the countries could not be defined. Some countries even did not have a system and others are in the process of establishing one.

From the discussions emerged the fact that many laws and regulations pertaining to civil registration and vital statistics systems need to be reviewed and, in some instances, have to be drafted for the first time. It also became obvious that there is disparity among the participating states in the fields of legislation and codes regulating the procedures of civil registration. Therefore, the need for more comprehensive laws in this field was accorded high priority and was considered as a key element in a strategy for prompting improvements in the systems. For instance, such laws should be specific on time allowances for registration and for handling delayed registrations, including penalties so that completeness of registration can be enhanced. It was also said that compulsory registration is a basic principle in civil registration and most of the current laws do have provisions. However, it was acknowledged that there is a lack of ways and means to enforce the existing laws and regulations. Civil registration laws should be made known to both the local registrars and to the public at large so that omissions in registering vital events would be minimized.

There was also disparity in the source of data from official and competent authorities, types of birth certificate formats, measures taken to control the process of civil registration and to achieve comprehensiveness therein, as well as on the range of benefits derived from it. The reliance on civil registration and vital statistics for social and economic development planning also differed from one state to another. Hence the importance of holding this workshop, in order to study the current situation, and to benefit from the guidelines and orientations prepared under the auspices of the International Programme for Accelerating the Improvement of Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems.

It was stressed that most countries or areas participating in the workshop that submitted papers, did not adhere to the guidelines for the preparation of the country report concerning the current status of civil registration and vital statistics, although those guidelines were appended by the United Nations Statistical Division to the invitations sent out to countries to participate in the workshop. The aim of providing guidelines for the preparation of the report was to have comparable reports at the regional level. UNSTAT and ESCWA requested all participants to complete their country reports within two months as those national reports serve the purposes of identifying the problems that hamper the development of such systems and thereafter to design the appropriate strategies and plan of action. Each country report was required to contain samples of the formats of birth, death, marriage and divorce certificates, as well as forms for reporting such events and the series of steps in which they are processed. Delegations were also requested to provide samples of forms to the Statistical Division in New York, which is building up a clearing house of information on the subject.

Other subjects raised during the discussions that followed the country presentations, included the following:

- The need to define the basic procedures for civil registration, whether it will be family-based, as in many of the participating countries or individual-based. Furthermore, terms and procedures should be unified nationwide so that the processes of registration and reporting become as comprehensive as possible.

- As some vital events are still registered by relying on the individuals to voluntarily register them, representatives suggested that there should be guidelines to compel institutions concerned with vital events registration to pass information on these events to the civil registration office, so that those institutions issue no documents to citizens, except via the civil register. This would ensure the flow of information in a correct and continuous way, in addition to defining the most important users of the data issued by civil registration. Eventually, this would also facilitate their use, even for the purpose of issuing passports,

visas and other documents.

- Urgency was felt to deal with contradictory figures issued by official authorities, which should be checked for consistency and coherency and a single set of such figures adopted as official.

- Emphasis was made to study the contents and detailed data in all formats used for civil registration and statistical reporting. It was stressed that each item in a civil registration record and a vital statistical report should have a definite goal and purpose, in order not to waste time, money and effort. Countries should therefore study the available capacities and should make all necessary efforts to allow for the generation of correct and timely vital statistics. It is equally important to unify terms, concepts and definitions and to coordinate technical assistance comprising technical expertise, office equipment, etc. Special attention should be placed on the collection of causes of death and on how to process and use such valuable information, unique to the civil registration system, thus accelerating the dissemination of results to serve the immediate needs of the country for such data. Countries should also enhance the aims of preparing and using civil registration records and vital statistics and may include economic and social topics in the vital statistics formats.

- Representatives stressed the need for carefully selecting experts who will work in this field in countries of the region and recommended that they should be familiar with the situations in the countries where they are going to work, knowledgeable about the adopted international programmes, and about international principles and recommendations on the subject for their application in the participant states.

- Other interventions related to the importance of making assessments concerning the extent of current coverage and comprehensiveness of civil registration, as well as the reduction in non-registrations. Country-specific well defined plans for this purpose will be needed. In looking for solutions to the problems of non-registration, for instance, mobile campaigns may be carried out, *inter alia*, in areas and communities where such cases abound.

- Another subject raised was the existence of more than one agency concerned with the registration of the same type of event which must be avoided. For instance, when the Ministry of Health registers births and deaths and the Department of Civil Registration does the same, the result may be an uncoordinated reporting process of births and deaths, because work may be carried out in the shadow of one system. Countries should strive to avoid duplication or the overlapping of functions in this field.

- Countries should also make provisions on how to handle damages and losses of civil registration records. This may happen when

marriages are registered, for example, at the offices of the Ministry of Interior and divorces are registered at the Ministry of Justice, requiring the forwarding of information from one place to the other.

- Furthermore, there should be definite procedures for the correction of errors if they are detected in registration records and vital statistical reports. It was pointed out that the civil registration is the basic source of information in the first year after registration, and accordingly is a competent authority for correcting any errors.

There were also some discussions concerning an important feature of the civil registration system, which is the recording of cause of death on death certificates. Once death records have been filled out, countries usually send a copy of the death registration record to the Ministry of Health in order to classify data by sex of the deceased, the conditions and the causes of death, and to study their impact on the demographic structure. However, a major obstacle to accuracy is that physicians lack experience in writing down the causes of death, or even in a large proportion of deaths, causes are not certified by physicians. For these reasons, some countries of the region have amended the way of collecting causes of death whereby physicians or concerned personnel are asked to write down the symptoms (using the listings prepared by WHO) that led to death instead of simply recording the cause of death. This is meant to refine the collection of data on causes of death whose quality is still inadequate. For example in Egypt, death records may contain inaccuracies in the rural areas. Around 1966, malaria was recorded as the most frequent cause of death and now the causes more frequently mentioned are heart-related diseases.

The 9th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases of the World Health Organization is being applied to classify the causes of death in most countries and areas of the ESCWA region. The meeting was informed that a committee has been established in Egypt to study the WHO 10th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases for its adoption in the near future. Other country representatives expressed their concern in terms of the training that will be needed to shift to the new WHO Tenth Revision of the International Classification of Deceases, and the need for WHO assistance in this regard,

The representative of WHO, Dr. Odile Frank, informed the meeting that the WHO has an international training program on how to use the Tenth Revision, as well as the modifications and training required to use it correctly. She asserted that soon there will be an Arabic version of the WHO Tenth Revision.



#### 4. Third Session: Modern Technology

At the session on modern technology for civil registration and vital statistics systems, the following technical papers were presented and discussed:

- Modern technology for storage and retrieval of civil registration records and processing of vital statistics (Vito Logrillo-UNSTAT) (WAW/CRVS/93/19)
- Danish experiences with computerization of civil registration (Karin Ifanger, Data Centralen, Denmark) (WAW/CRVS/93/20)
- Register-based vital statistics. Issues to consider; some Danish experiences (Anita Lange, Denmark Statistics, Denmark) (WAW/CRVS/93/21)
- Automated system for registering live births, generating statistical tables and issuing the report (LIVE) (Demonstration by Ahmad Hussein, Statistics Division, ESCWA) (WAW/CRVS/93/31)

The experiences of some countries outside of the ESCWA region, in particular that of the United States of America, on modern technology for storage and retrieval of civil registration records and processing of vital statistics, were referred to in the paper presented by Mr. Vito Logrillo.

He stated that the use and application of modern technology in the areas of civil registration and vital statistics have had major impacts in the systems of various countries. Movement toward automated civil registration functions as well as the processing and analysis of vital statistics data through computerized methods are producing significant improvements in these areas. Automated registration applications provide for auto-coding of reported data, on-line record updating capabilities, automated indexes for record search and retrieval, administrative report preparation, and tracking of records and requests for services from the public. In vital statistics, automated processes provide for improved data access, quality and timeliness; linkage to other relevant data bases for research, planning and evaluation of health indicators and population demographics; significant improvements in the importing and exporting of data with other information systems; and flexibility in data modifications.

Systems being developed in various states in the United States of America (each state has its own civil registration and vital statistics system) include computer-based systems, optical disk systems, and computer-assisted microfilm systems. In addition, many states are now moving toward implementation of electronic birth and death recording systems, where the reporting source has

responsibility for the electronic recording and transmission of the vital records to the state's central registration office. Current software and hardware developed for these applications have made implementation of the automated processes for civil registration and vital statistics functions cost-effective, efficient and technically feasible. The national goal, developed in conjunction with the individual state registration programmes in the United States of America, is to have an electronic birth and death recording system in place in all states with electronic transmission of vital statistics data to the national statistical office (the National Center for Health Statistics) by the year 2000. This is made feasible by the availability of financial resources.

At the present time, the degree of computerization and the use of modern technology in the civil registration and vital statistics systems of United States of America varies from state to state, with some more advanced than others. There is no doubt about the importance of automation in the various states in the United States.

The representative of Denmark (Ms. Karin Ifanger) provided an overview of the main characteristics of the civil registration system in Denmark, which is a main component of the Central Population Register (CPR). The CPR is fully automated and paperless from the official entry into the local population register. It has an on-line update system, an on-line enquiry system, an ID-card interface-system, a unified coding system, a service system, a batch control system, the back-up recovery system and the security system.

It was pointed out that although population registration is highly developed and fully computerized (the registration of vital events and their changes is fully automated) and the local network of population registers are linked on-line to the central population register, mistakes may still occur in the registration of civil status, particularly in cases involving those who migrated or died, but remained registered. Any database of civil registration should take these facts into consideration, as mistakes are present and errors may occur in any system, involving either active or inactive individuals. However, mistakes can be discovered in a short period of time and easily corrected as they are very small in Denmark, compared to the numbers of the population. The meeting was informed that Denmark does not consider it necessary to hold a comprehensive population census, as the population register yields the necessary data on a yearly basis (as of 1 January), by sex, single year-age groups, civil status, country of origin, citizenship, etc.

An important feature of the CPR, is the registration of vital events and their subsequent changes into a fully automated registration system. The updating of the population register file

is made electronically on a daily basis as vital events are registered.

From the statistical point of view, the representative of Denmark (Ms. Anita Lange), gave a description of the register-based vital statistics in Denmark. She drew attention to matters that are important in compiling this type of statistics and stated that, the registration of vital events has become one of the tasks of the state. The meeting was informed that since 1924, every municipality in Denmark has kept a local population register. These registers contain identifying information such as name, occupation, date and place of birth, address, family circumstances and nationality. Registers were transferred from the Church to Civil Affairs in 1968 when electronic data processing was introduced and a civil registration system was established.

The responsibility for the general statistical utilization of the information in the Central Population Register rests with **Danmarks Statistik**, which is an independent institution. During the 1970's, register-based statistics were established and developed by Danmarks Statistik. The source of these statistics was information from the CPR, in some cases combined with information from other sources. Then the whole system from the registration of the vital event to the finished statistics was described. For instance, births are reported by local authorities and by the individual concerned, whereas for changes in address the individual person is the only one who is under an obligation to report. She mentioned that birth and death certificates consisted of two parts, civil and medical, and that there is also a microfilm. Copies of certificates go to the Civil Service, while others go to the Health Department. When these are processed, some disparity may appear in the ultimate results. It was pointed out that the official source for disseminating such data and distributing them to official and international bodies, is Danmarks Statistik. When disparities and mistakes occur, the official figure of vital statistics is adopted after comparisons between the different sources until the final figure is obtained. Two main points regarding the reliability of the register are completeness and timeliness. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that relevant events are accurately and promptly recorded on the register. However it is sometimes difficult to achieve both objectives. For most people, as per the experience of Denmark, events like births, deaths and marriages will be usually more obvious to register than changes of place of residence (address) and emigrations.

Quarterly vital statistics are compiled for Denmark as a whole and for each municipality. The final statistics of births and deaths, i.e., the information which is constructed by linking information from CPR and information from the certificates, are only compiled annually.

Next, an automated registration system for live births and for the issuance of statistical reports, was demonstrated by the representative from ESCWA (Mr. Ahmad Hussein). The system called "LIVE", has been developed by the Statistics Division of ESCWA. With the assistance of personal computers, the system showed how to record live births, compile statistics from them and issue a publication on births .

The system was converted to Arabic by using WINDOW software (NAFITHA in Arabic). Participants in the workshop were briefed on the requirements of the system and on its loading onto the hard disk. The LIVE demonstration was also informative of the system's methods of operation and of its distinctive features.

The printing of statistical reports was also displayed and so were methods used for processing coded files employed for the purpose of registering occupation, nationality, governorate, cities, religion, as well as for the safe keeping of index files and the preparation of reserved copies on floppy discs.

Participants were informed that "LIVE" program may be obtained by writing to the Chief, Statistics Division, ESCWA.

#### **5. Fourth Session: Other sources of vital statistics and rates**

The representative from UNSTAT (Mrs. Violeta Gonzales) presented a paper on other ways and means to collect data that would provide vital statistics and rates (WAW/CRVS/93/27) through household surveys and population censuses. The advantages and disadvantages of each method were highlighted and so were the various approaches used to collect data on fertility and mortality, including examples of the proper wording of the questions. There are statistical methods known as the single round survey or retrospective survey approach, suitable for rapid results as compared with population census, the dual- records system, or follow up surveys. There are also special surveys concerning ever-married women to measure trends and patterns of fertility and infant mortality. Furthermore, there are also questions included in population censuses concerning family relations and kinship that can be used to calculate fertility rates, known as the own children method.

Furthermore in-depth retrospective surveys could include questions about knowledge and current use of contraceptive methods, family planning, the date of marriage, a maternity history, etc. Such surveys should be conducted by highly trained enumerators, preferably women, with close supervision.

There are also follow up surveys in order to obtain direct information about births and deaths, and to minimize memory lapses.

They may be conducted at the rate of 3-4 rounds, with intervals of six months in between. This would make it easy to remember information; and after recording information about all household members in the first round, changes could be noted down in the follow up rounds, and so on. In this way, it can be ascertained that no births or deaths have been omitted; and in order to improve reports about infant mortality, a woman should be asked whether she is pregnant or not. These surveys are considered important for the purpose of calculating some vital rates, although relatively large samples are needed in order to obtain sufficient numbers of births and deaths.

Another possibility is the dual-records system where ~~by~~ vital events are recorded by two independent systems. India provides a good and well documented example on the application of this method to estimate vital rates by the so called sample registration scheme.

In fact, some or all of these methods can be used by the states in a complementary, supportive or temporary way until a comprehensive and complete registration system is well established.

Participants acknowledged that the lack of a good data base for vital statistics makes it difficult to understand changes in the population distribution by sex or age. Hence, projections or estimations are often inadequate since populations moved frequently in the Gulf states. Surveys appear to be most suitable and can complement civil registration data. Notwithstanding the fact that surveys often yield some useful information, the registration method is preferable to estimation as the former avoids a number of errors. Sample surveys and censuses must be encouraged, although it must be realized that the two complement and support each other but never present an alternative to universal civil registration and vital statistics systems.

The following technical papers were also presented in this session, and they outlined the role of national, international and regional organizations in improving national civil registration and vital statistics systems:

- National commitment to an improvement program of civil registration and vital statistics systems: Argentina (Alejandro Giusti, National Institute of Statistics and Census, Argentina) (WAW/CRVS/93/28)
- Current status of civil registration and vital statistics systems in Western Asia and suggestions for improvement (Ahmad Hussein, Statistics Division, ESCWA) (WAW/CRVS/93/29)
- Civil registration and population registers in the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan (Abdulah Sammour, UNFPA Country Support

Team Office for the Arab States) (WAW/CRVS/93/30)

The representative of Argentina (Mr. Alejandro Giusti), informed the participants that, after the Workshop on Strategies for Accelerating the Improvement of Civil registration and Vital Statistics, held in Buenos Aires from 2 to 6 December 1991 under the auspices of the International Programme and hosted by the Government of Argentina, the institutions involved in the production of vital statistics are committed to carry out an in-depth analysis of the local settings for civil registration and vital statistics. The goal is to develop a scientific base for a national programme to improve the systems. Both, the Health Statistics Office, Ministry of Public Health, in charge of vital statistics information at the national level and the National Institute of Statistics and Census, responsible for the National Statistical System are engaged in a series of activities to have a close look of the disparities and specific problems within each province. Participants were informed that Argentina has a federal organization and so does civil registration, i.e., each of its 24 provinces has its own civil registration and vital statistics systems.

Until now, the activities have been focused on the diagnosis of the provincial systems, revision of the forms for recording vital events and manuals, consistency analysis and evaluation of data quality, and the carrying out of 12 out of 24 planned provincial workshops for improving vital statistics, including the formation of provincial committees. For the sub-national workshops, the methodology employed in the Latin American Workshop has been utilized. This joint initiative is entirely funded by the government of Argentina, which has enabled the development of important activities in 1992, the undertaking of others in 1993 and will allow for the implementation of other activities in 1994. Thereafter, a national plan will be drawn to be gradually implemented. Participants in the workshop were encouraged to strive toward the design and implementation of a national plan based on an in-depth study of their current situation.

The representative from ESCWA (Mr. Ahmad Hussein) discussed the current status of civil registration and vital statistics in the countries of the region as reflected in the statements of the participating states received by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. Some of the proposals and recommendations put forward were reviewed with a view to improving the system, affirming the need to adopt clear codes and legislation in registering the five types of vital events. Certificate forms used by the various countries in this connection were also presented. Definitions recommended by the United Nations and the registration methods were made available to delegates within the course of the workshop.

The study classified countries according to four groupings, and summed up problems facing current registration identifying them as follows: lack of necessary and adequate financing; low level of awareness regarding the importance of civil registration; inefficiency of personnel in civil registration; and ardent need to organize quick training courses on the use of advanced technology for civil registration and vital statistics systems.

The need to establish continuous cooperation and coordination between authorities involved in civil registration, statistical institutions and other supportive bodies was underscored, so was the need to adopt modern methods and technology which can facilitate the transition from manual to automatic registration in the light of available potentials so that automation can help the monitoring of full coverage of vital statistics including estimates, projections, periodic studies, life tables, health and epidemic indicators, public health programmes, child and maternal care, family planning services, standard tabulation programmes, estimates of child mortality probabilities based on data of previous live births and survivors; follow up and assessment of population policies, family planning programmes, the estimation of discrepancy rates in death registration and estimation of the corrected death rate, such as the linking between population and demographic indicators with economic parameters: their geographic distributions, economic activities, vocations, etc.

The representative of the United Nations Population Fund, Regional Office of the Country Support Team for the Arab States (Mr. Abdullah Sammour) offered a comparative overview of the civil registration and vital statistics systems in Syria and Jordan. The former, mostly manually operated, is the oldest system in the region. The latter is going into fully computerized methods for both civil registration and the issuing of certificates and other related documents. So far, about 95 percent of the total households in Jordan are already in the newly computerized system; however, they have not entered vital events for statistical purposes yet.

#### **6. Working Groups: Strategies for systems improvement**

Two discussion groups were formed to seek strategies for accelerating the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems in countries of the ESCWA region.

Group one comprised Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Yemen, Kuwait, and Qatar. The session was headed by Mr. Gamal El-din Mahmoud Fangary, representative of Egypt and Mr. Yousif Al Madi, the representative of Palestine as rapporteur.

Group two comprised Jordan, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Syria. The session was chaired by Mr. Ahmad Hilal

with Mr. Nasri Abdul-Raheem Al-Shamayli, representative of Jordan as **rapporteur**.

The two groups made various recommendations concerning the strategies for accelerating the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems. These recommendations were discussed again in the sixth session devoted to the adoption of the workshop recommendations and are presented in chapter I of this report (see Introduction, section 3: Recommendations of the Workshop).

## **7. Fifth session: Main uses of vital records and statistics**

The following reports were presented for discussion:

- Uses of vital records and statistics for social and economic developmental programs (I. Moriyama, International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics) (WAW/CRVS/93/23)
- Uses of civil registration records and vital statistics in health programs and services (Odile Frank, WHO-Geneva and Mohammed Ouakrim, WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean) (WAW/CRVS/93/24)
- Uses of vital statistics in demographic analysis (Ahmed Al-Ayyat, Statistics Division, ESCWA) (WAW/CRVS/93/25)
- Uses of vital statistics in demographic analysis in Egypt (Mr. Hisham Makhoul and Saad Zagloul Amin, Cairo Demographic Center)

The representative of the International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics (Dr. Iwao Moriyama) gave an overview of the wide range of uses of vital records and statistics and the role they play in the lives of individuals and in the social and economic development of countries. The records of live births, deaths, marriages and divorces are paramount to the individual person as they constitute proof of the fact, the date, and the place of occurrence of the event. Also they contain other information required for establishing certain relationships such as parentage, legitimacy, dependency and lineage.

It was further stated that vital records are also indispensable for the society at large for updating of official files of various kinds such as population registers, the files of personal identity systems, social security rosters, and electoral rolls. In these uses, the individual birth record constitutes proof of age, that is when an individual becomes eligible for an identity card, to vote or to receive certain benefits. The death record is used to remove from the system ineligible individuals to prevent fraudulent use of personal identity cards, illegal exercise



of the voting franchise, fraudulent receipt of benefits, etc. For instance, the population register and population identification systems depend heavily on current registration of vital events for updating their own files. Another programme of major importance that benefits from civil registration is family planning. Here vital statistics provide the basic data for measuring the magnitude of population growth, and fertility statistics will identify the segment of the population in need for family planning. Because vital statistics constitute the components of the population growth, adequate vital statistics are needed for population projections. These require projections of birth rates in order to estimate the numbers of children of school age, in need of vaccinations, etc. to be anticipated in future years.

Uses of civil registration records and vital statistics in health programmes and services were addressed by the two representatives of the World Health Organization (Dr. Odile Frank and Mr. M'hamed Ouakrim). The contribution of civil registration to fertility measurement was discussed as well as the measurement of mortality was considered and the role of registration in improving not only measurement, but also the base for health programme and service intervention. She said that no increment of information, however, has as great an influence on potential usefulness to health programmes and services as the determination of causes of death on the basis of medical certification at the time of death, assuming, reliability and satisfactory coverage. The addition of cause of death to death registration represents by itself a remarkable achievement of coordination between the administrative and the medical institutions of societies that have introduced it. Unlike the fact of death, cause of death determination had to wait upon the development of medical diagnosis to become useful to health professionals. It then becomes possible to determine cause-specific mortality by age and sex, at a demographic level, and to study disease patterns, such as in environment studies and case-control studies. Record linkage to births and other data (medical, employment and social insurance systems) allow for more specific epidemiological study, and any supplemental information on social and economic factors allows for broad analysis of determinants of health and disease.

The representative of ESCWA (Mr. Ahamd Al-Ayyat) gave a detailed and comprehensive overview of the main applications of vital statistics in the field of demographic analysis, especially for countries in the ESCWA region. He said that a wide range of demographic indicators can be obtained continuously from civil registration data that include measurement of infant and child mortality, fertility and mortality patterns and trends, maternal mortality, life tables, natural population growth, nuptiality tables, etc.. These indicators play an important role in population projections. The very essence of these figures is that they do not rely on theoretical models that imply several

assumptions. Of course, a necessary condition is the reliability, accuracy and timeliness with which data can be issued.

The representative from the Cairo Demographic Center (Mr. Saad Zaghloul Amid) reported on the use of vital statistics in demographic analysis in Egypt. Vital statistics are among the main sources of demographic data. One of their advantages is a dynamic picture of population changes, whereas other sources, such as population census, provide only a static profile of the population at a particular time.

In Egypt, vital statistics has played an important role in demographic analysis. The practice began in 1930 when the first life table was constructed for the year 1927 using the distribution of deaths by age, taken from vital statistics, and the distribution of population census by age (census, 1927). Since that time, vital statistics have contributed to a very large number of demographic and population studies, which helped in clarifying population problem in Egypt, the three main dimensions of which are high population growth, youthful population and unbalanced geographic distribution. It was said that vital statistics, for example, are an aid in estimating the size of the population of the whole country and of its governorates for every year between censuses. They reveal the trends in various phenomena through the changes in birth, death, marriage and divorce rates. They are also used in determining the construction of life tables, fertility tables and nuptiality tables. This information is used to formulate national population projections for use in socio-economic development planning. Vital statistics are also used to evaluate census figures. Finally, some demographic indicators for Egypt were given based on vital and other statistics.

The discussions and deliberations stressed the importance of the use of vital statistics as an essential subject of considerable interest for participants, who have been on the processes of developing the fields of utilizing vital statistics data in more comprehensive ways. These include, for example, health strategies, and the implementation of specific health programmes including preventive medicine, treatment and health management. These fields show indirect links between health and civil registration through the use of direct or indirect statistical means. Special care should be shown in communities that neglect the registration of females and show preference for males only. The registration of deaths contributes to attempts to give accurate assessment of the status of public health, nursing mothers and infants, as well as the use of techniques against epidemics. The analysis of the causes of death according to age categories and the corresponding total number of the population would allow the estimation of age-specific morality rates and life expectancies.

The analytical reports issued by international bodies with deep experience in such fields will help to improve the implementation of the plans of social and economic development. All these vital topics were raised in this workshop

The intensive and extensive utilization of vital records and statistics was viewed as a key element in any strategy for systems' improvement. Governments should therefore make provisions in this regard in different fields to secure improvements in their systems.

#### **7. Sixth Session: Adoption of the Workshop Recommendations**

The participants discussed the recommendations presented to them from the two discussion groups. In view of the fact that the civil registration and vital statistics systems of the countries in the ESCWA region are facing technical, administrative and legal problems, with few exceptions, the participants adopted a list of recommendations, which have been reproduced in the Introduction, section 3, pages 5 and 6 of this report.

#### **8. Closure of the workshop**

Dr. Labeeb Abdunnur, Chief, Statistics Division of ESCWA and Dr. Y. C. Yu, Chief of the Demographic and Social Statistic Branch, UNSTAT expressed once again their gratitude to the Government of Syria for hosting the workshop. They also were thankful for the contribution of technical papers to the workshop by country representatives and experts that gave the grounds for discussion and for their active participation that enriched the results of the workshop. They urged countries to continue working towards the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems and in the implementation of the recommendations emanated from this important workshop. Special recognition was given to the United Nations Population Fund for the financial support to the Workshop. The collaborative effort of United Nations Statistical Division and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia in the organization of this workshop was highly praised.

The participants decided to send a letter to his Excellency Mr. Hafez Al-Assad, President of the Syrian Arab Republic (full text in Annex 4), expressing their deepest appreciation for hosting the workshop in Damascus.

Finally, Dr. Ibrahim Ali, Chairman of the Workshop, after thanking all the participants for their valuable and meaningful contributions during the five-day sessions, declared the workshop closed at 1 PM on Thursday 24 June 1993.

# ANNEX 1. WORKSHOP AGENDA

SUNDAY, JUNE 20 1993

## MORNING SESSION

0830-1000 hours	Registration
1000-1100	Opening
1100-1130	Break
1130-1200	Election of officers
1200-1215	Adoption of the Agenda
1215-1245	1. The International Program (UN Statistical Division) (WAW/CRVS/93/4,5 and 6)
1245-1335	2. National reports on current status of civil registration and vital statistics systems - strategies for improvement
	Jordan (WAW/CRVS/93/9)
	United Arab Emirates (WAW/CRVS/93/17)
	Saudi Arabia (WAW/CRVS/93/15)

## AFTERNOON SESSION

1700-1815	National reports on current status of civil registration and vital statistics system - strategies for improvement (continued):
	Syrian Arab Republic (WAW/CRVS/93/16)
	Iraq (WAW/CRVS/93/8)
	Oman (WAW/CRVS/93/12)
1815-1900	Discussion

MONDAY, JUNE 21 93

## MORNING SESSION

0900-1115 (including coffee break)	National reports on current status of civil registration and vital statistics systems - strategies for improvement (continued):
	Palestine (WAW/CRVS/93/13)
	Lebanon (WAW/CRVS/93/11)
	Qatar (WAW/CRVS/93/14)
	Kuwait (WAW/CRVS/93/10)
	Egypt (WAW/CRVS/93/7)
	Yemen (WAW/CRVS/93/18)

**AFTERNOON SESSION**

3. Modern technology in civil registration and vital statistics systems
- 1600-1630 Modern technology for storage and retrieval of civil registration records and processing of vital statistics (WAW/CRVS/93/19)
- 1630-1700 Danish experiences with computerization of civil registration (Data Centralen, Denmark) (WAW/CRVS/93/20)
- 1700-1730 Register-based vital statistics. Issues to consider; some Danish experiences (Denmark Statistics, Denmark) (WAW/CRVS/93/21)
- 1730-1745 Break
- 1745-1830 Discussion
- 1830-1930 Automated system for registering live births, generating statistical tables and issuing the report (LIVE) (Demonstration by Statistics Division, ESCWA) (WAW/CRVS/93/31)

**TUESDAY, JUNE 22 1993**

**MORNING SESSION**

4. Other data collection methods providing vital statistics and rates
- 0900--0945 hours Other data collection methods and techniques providing vital statistics and rates (United Nations Statistical Division) (WAW/CRVS/93/27)
5. Role of national, regional and international agencies in improving civil registration and vital statistics systems (UNSTAT, WHO, UNFPA, CDC, Argentina, IIVRS, USBC)
- 0945-1015 National commitment to an improvement program of civil registration and vital statistics systems: Argentina (National Institute of Statistics and Census, Argentina) (WAW/CRVS/93/28)
- 1015-1045 Current status of civil registration and vital statistics systems in Western Asia and suggestions for improvement (Statistics Division, ESCWA) (WAW/CRVS/93/29)

- 1045-1130 Break
- 1100-1130 Civil registration and population registers in the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan (UNFPA Country Support Team Office for the Arab States) (WAW/CRVS/93/30)
- 1130-1230 Discussion

**AFTERNOON SESSION**

6. Group discussion: strategies for improving civil registration and vital statistics systems (two groups)
- 1600-1800 hours Strategies for improving civil registration and vital statistics systems
- 1800-1815 Break
- 1815-1930 Conclusions and recommendations for improving civil registration and vital statistics systems

**WEDNESDAY, JUNE 23 1993**

7. Main uses of civil registration records and vital statistics
- 0900-0930 Uses of vital records and statistics for social and economic developmental programs (International Institute for vital Registration and Statistics) (WAW/CRVS/93/23)
- 0930-1000 Uses of civil registration records and vital statistics in health programs and services (WHO-Geneva and WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean) (WAW/CRVS/93/24)
- 1000-1030 Uses of vital statistics in demographic analysis (Statistics Division, ESCWA) (WAW/CRVS/93/25)
- 1030-1115 Uses of vital statistics in demographic analysis in Egypt (Cairo Demographic Center) (WAW/CRVS/93/26)
- 1115-1230 Discussion

AFTERNOON SESSION

1600-1800 hours

Working group reports

THURSDAY, JUNE 24 1993

MORNING SESSION

1130-1230 hours

Conclusions and recommendations of the workshop

1230-1330

Closing

## ANNEX 2

### LIST OF WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

#### 1. Country representatives:

##### Egypt:

1. General Ibrahim Ibrahim Bossylah  
 Director General of Civil Affairs Department  
 Interior Ministry  
 Cairo, Egypt  
 C/O Mr. Abdl El-Moughny M. Saad  
 Under Secretary of CAPMAS  
 P.O.Box 2086 Cairo  
 Tel: 804632, Fax: (202) 604099

2. Mr. Gamal El-din Mahmoud Fangary  
 Director Department of Vital Statistics  
 Central Agency for Public Mobilisation  
 and Statistics (CAPMAS)  
 Nasr City, Cairo  
 P.O.Box 2086 Cairo  
 Tel: 804632, Fax: (202) 604099

##### Iraq:

1. Mr. Abdullah Hasan Mathi  
 Director of Research  
 Department of Population Statistics  
 Central Statistics Organization  
 P.O.Box 8001  
 Baghdad, Iraq

2. Ms. Nuha Khudhur Yousif  
 Chief of Statistics  
 Department of Population Statistics  
 Central Statistics Organization  
 P.O.Box 8001. Baghdad, Iraq

##### Jordan:

1. Mr. Fahad Abdel Fatah Suliman Al-Najdawi  
 Head, Vital Statistics,  
 Department of Statistics  
 P.O.Box 2015  
 Amman, Jordan  
 Tel : (962-6) 842 171  
 Fax : (962-6) 833 518



2. Mr. Nasri Abdul-Raheem Al-Shamayli  
Civil Status Department  
Director of Western Amman Office  
P.O.Box 3102  
Amman, Jordan  
Tel : (962-6) 636 378  
Fax : (962-6) 642 621

3. Mr. Abdullah Globe  
Vital Statistics,  
Department of Statistics  
P.O.Box 2015. Amman, Jordan  
Tel : (962-6) 842 171  
Fax : (962-6) 833 518

### **Kuwait:**

1. Mr. Mohamad Hussein-Al-Omar  
Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI)  
C/O Mr. Khaled Philby  
UNDP Resident Representative  
P.O.Box 2993, 13030 Safat, Kuwait  
Cable:UNDEVPRO-Kuwait, Fax (965) 5325879,  
Tel.: (965) 6329870/1/2

2. Mr. Issa Mohammad Al-Rashid  
Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI)  
C/O Mr. Khaled Philby  
UNDP Resident Representative  
P.O.Box 2993, 13030 Safat, Kuwait  
Cable:UNDEVPRO-Kuwait, Fax (965) 5325879,  
Tel.: (965) 6329870/1/2

### **Lebanon:**

1. Mr. Adel Elias Choueri Chalhoub  
Acting Director-General  
Central Statistics Bureau  
Beirut, Lebanon  
Tel. 318488  
C/O Mr. Hendrik Van der Kloet  
UNDP Resident Representative UNIFIL House  
Capt. Ali Ahmed Building  
Bir Hassan  
Beirut, Lebanon. Fax: (357-09) 522948

2. Mr. Elie Michel Shehade  
Chief of Statistics  
Directorate of Civil Registration  
C/O Mr. Hendrik Van der Kloet  
UNDP Resident Representative

UNIFIL House  
 Capt. Ali Ahmed Building  
 Bir Hassan  
 Beirut, Lebanon  
 Fax: (357-09) 522948

### Oman :

1. Mr. Salem Hamed Salem Al-Tauqi  
 Acting Director  
 Directorate General of Statistics,  
 Development Council  
 General Secretariat  
 P.O.Box 881  
 Muscat, Sultanate of Oman  
 Tel. : (of.) (968) 698 900, (res.): (968) 535076  
 Fax. : (968) 696 285

2. Mr. AbdelKarim Hassan Sulieman  
 Chief, Information and Statistics Department  
 Ministry of Public Health  
 C/O Mr. Salem H. S. Al-Tauqi  
 Acting Director  
 Directorate General of Statistics  
 Development Council  
 General Secretariat  
 P.O.Box 881  
 Muscat, Sultanate of Oman  
 Tel. : (of.) (968) 698900, (res.) : (968) 535076  
 Fax. : (968) 696285

### Palestine:

1. Mr. Yusef Falah Ismail  
 Statistics Coordinator  
 Council Higher Education Council  
 Ramallah, Occupied west Bank  
 P.O.Box 17360, Jerusalem  
 Tel: 951208  
 Fax: 894708

2. Dr. Yousef Ibraheem AbdelHaq  
 Deputy Chief, Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics  
 and Natural Resources  
 P.O.Box 960420  
 Amman, Jordan [Fax :(9626) 603938]

3. Mr. Yousif Al Madi  
 Technical Manager, Palestine Bureau of Statistics  
 Damascus, Syria  
 P.O.Box 2889.Damascus, Syria. (Fax : 443525)

**Qatar:**

1. Mr. Abdullah Ibrahim Mohamad Al-Emadi  
 Information Systems Analyst  
 Hamad Medical Corporation  
 P.O.Box 3050. Doha, Qatar  
 Tel. : 492 417  
 Fax. : (0974) 322 777

2. Mr. Jamal Abdullah Al-Midfa  
 Statistical Researcher, Central Statistical Organization  
 P.O.Box 7283. Doha, Qatar  
 Tel. : 497497  
 Fax : (0974) 445573

**Saudi Arabia:**

1. Mr. Abdullah M. Al-Sagr  
 Chief, Civil Registry  
 Ministry of Interior  
 C/O Mr. Hassan Issa  
 Resident Representative, UNDP  
 P.O.Box 558  
 Riyadh 11421, Saudi Arabia

**Syrian Arab Republic:**

1. Dr. Ibrahim Ali  
 Director-General  
 Central Bureau of Statistics  
 Office of the Prime Minister  
 Damascus, Syria. (TELEX: STC 411099 SY)  
 Tel. 335 830 or 330 975

2. Mr. Marwan Miski  
 Director of Social Statistics  
 Central Bureau of Statistics  
 Office of the Prime Minister  
 Damascus, Syria  
 Tel. 335 830, 330 975  
 Telex: STC 411099 SY, FAX: C/O UNDP, CABLE STATISTIQUES

3. Brigadier Ahmad Hilal  
 Deputy-Minister of Interior  
 Ministry of Interior  
 Damascus, Syria  
 Tel.(home) : 622171  
 Private Address: Mezze, Rue Saad. Ibn Abi Wakass S.  
 Damascus, Syria

**United Arab Emirates:**

1. Mr. Mohamad Salah Shelwah  
 C/O Mr. Abdelrahman Abdalla,  
 Resident Representative, UNDP  
 Khalifa Bin Shakbout Street  
 West 17/1 Villa No. 41  
 Abu-Dhabi, United Arab Emirates  
 Fax : (971 2) 650818

2. Mr. Majed Sultan  
 C/O Mr. Abdelrahman Abdalla,  
 Resident Representative, UNDP  
 Khalifa Bin Shakbout Street  
 West 17/1 Villa No. 41  
 Abu-Dhabi, United Arab Emirates  
 Fax : (971 2) 650818

**Yemen:**

1. Mr. Ahmed Ali Al-Sanabani  
 General Director of Population & Social Statistics  
 Social Department  
 Central Statistical Organization  
 P.O.Box 13443  
 Sana'a, Republic of Yemen  
 Tel. : 250101, 250108  
 Telex: 2266  
 Fax. : 250664

2. Mr. Hamood Ahmed Al-Asari  
 Deputy-Manager, Dept. of Statistics  
 Civil Registration Authority (CAR)  
 Ministry of Interior and Security  
 P.O.Box 1696. Sana'a, Republic of Yemen

2. **Participants from other countries, international and regional organizations:**

a. **Other Countries :**

**Argentina:**

1. Mr. Alejandro Giusti  
 Chief, Demographic Analysis  
 National Institute of Statistics and Censuses  
 Avenue Julio A. Roca 609, Room 301  
 Buenos Aires, Argentina  
 Fax: (54-1) 343 0564, Tel: (54-1) 343 3271

**Denmark:**

1. Ms. Karin Ifanger  
 Dansoftware International A/S  
 Datavej 30-P.O.Box 165  
 DK-3469 Birkerod  
 Denmark  
 Tel.: (45 42) 816436  
 Fax : (45 42) 816679

2. Ms. Anita Lange  
 Master of Science  
 Head of Section, Denmark Statistics  
 Sejrogade 11  
 2100 Kobehavn O. Denmark  
 Tel : ( 45 39 ) 173917  
 Fax : ( 45 31 ) 184801

**United States of America:**

1. Mr. Richard Storm  
 Assistant Division Chief for Education and  
 Information Services  
 International Statistical Programs Center  
 Bureau of the Census  
 Washington, DC 20233-0001  
 Tel. : (41 22) 7912111  
 Fax. : (41 22) 7637589

**b. Cairo Demographic Center :**

1. Mr. Hisham Makhlof  
 Director, Cairo Demographic Center (CDC)  
 78 (4th ST.)  
 El-Hadhaba-Elolya,  
 Mokattam (11571)  
 Cairo, Egypt  
 Tel.: (202) 50260735, Fax : (202) 5062797

2. Mr. Saad Zagloul Amin  
 Cairo Demographic Center (CDC)  
 78 (4th St.)  
 El-Hadhaba-Elolya,  
 Mokattam (11571)  
 Cairo, Egypt  
 Tel : (202) 50260735  
 Fax : (202) 5062797

**c. International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics (IIVRS)**

1. Dr. Iwao Moriyama  
Executive Director, (IIVRS)  
9650 Rockville Pike  
Bethesda, Maryland, (USA)  
Tel. : ( 301) 5307131  
Fax. : ( 301) 5711855

**d. United Nations Population Fund**

1. Mr. Abdullah Sammour  
Advisor on data Processing  
Regional Office of the Country Support Team  
for the Arab States.  
7 Najaf Street, Um othaina, Jabal  
Amman, Jordan  
Mailing address:  
P.O.Box 830824  
Amman, Jordan  
Tel. : (962-6)816580, Fax. : (962-6)816580

**e. World Health Organization:**

1. Dr. Odile Frank  
Global Health Situation Assessment  
and Projections Unit  
World Health Organization  
CH-1211 Geneva 27- Switzerland  
Tel. : (41 22) 7912111, Fax. : (41 22) 7910746  
Telegraf : UNISANTE GENEVA

2. Mr. M'hamed Ouakrim  
Regional Adviser Health Situation and Trend Assessment  
Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean  
P.O.Box 1517  
Alexandria, Egypt  
Tel. : (20-3) 4830090, 4830097  
Fax. : (20-3) 4838916, Telex : 54028/54684 WHO UN

**f. United Nations:**

**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia:**

1. Dr. Labeeb Abdunuur  
Chief, Statistics Division. ESCWA  
P.O.Box 927115. Amman, Jordan  
Tel.: (962-6) 694351, ext. 205, Fax.: (962-6) 694981,2

2. Dr. Ahmad Hussein  
 Statistician, Statistics Division  
 ESCWA  
 P.O.Box 927115. Amman, Jordan  
 Tel.: (962-6) 694351, ext. 211. Fax.: (962-6) 694981,2

3. Mr. Ahmed Al-Ayyat  
 Statistician, Statistics Division  
 ESCWA  
 P.O.Box 927115. Amman, Jordan  
 Tel. : ( 962-6) 694351, ext. 212  
 Fax. : ( 962-6) 694981, 2

4. Miss Ruba Al-Khaleq  
 Research Assistant, Statistics Division  
 ESCWA  
 P.O.Box 927115. Amman, Jordan  
 Tel. : (962-6)694351, ext. 121  
 Fax. : (962-6) 694981,2

5. Mr. Ali Abdallah  
 Conference Assistant, Conference Services Section  
 ESCWA  
 P.O.Box 927115. Amman, Jordan  
 Tel.: (962-6) 694351, ext. 118  
 Fax.: (962-6) 694981,2 Telex 21691,7,8

### **United Nations Statistical Division:**

1. Dr. Y.C.Yu  
 Chief, Demographic and Social Statistical Branch  
 Statistical Division  
 DC2- Room 1520  
 United Nations  
 New York, NY 10017  
 Tel. : (212) 963-4983, Fax. : (212) 963-1940

2. Mrs. Violeta Gonzales-Diaz  
 Demographic Statistician  
 Demographic and Social Statistics Branch,  
 Statistical Division  
 DC2- Room 1518  
 United Nations  
 New York , NY 10017  
 Tel. : (212) 963-4966, Fax: (212) 963-4116

3. Dr. Sirageldin Hassan Suliman  
 Specialist in Demographic Statistics, Civil Registration  
 and Vital Statistics  
 Demographic and Social Statistics Branch,  
 Statistical Division  
 DC2 - Room 1526

United Nations  
 New York, NY 10017  
 Tel. : (212) 963-4375, Fax.: (212) 963-1940

4. Mr. Vito Logrillo  
 Consultant to the United Nations  
 Director of Information Resources Management  
 New York State Department of Health  
 Empire State Plaza, Room 308  
 Tower Building  
 Albany, New York 12237-0045  
 Fax. : (518) 4737286, Tel. : (518) 4738906

### 3. Observers: Syrian Arab Republic

1. Mr. Mahmoud Fatal  
 Deputy Director, Central Statistics Bureau
2. Mr. Sahfik Al-Debis  
 Director, Civil Registration Directorate, Syria
3. Mr. Mahmoud Ayoubieh  
 Director, Internal Control, Ministry of Interior
4. Mr. Issam Abou Al Shamat  
 Director Operations Office, Ministry of Interior
5. Mr. Mansour Al Abbass  
 Director, Legal Affairs, Ministry of Interior
6. Mr. Farouk Arnaout  
 Director-Studies, Civil Registration Directorate  
 Ministry of Interior
7. Mr. Jameel Jumaat  
 Director, Follow up and guidance, Ministry of Interior
8. Mr. Khalouf Obied  
 Secretary-Civil Registration, Damascus
9. Mr. Nazeer Khaliefeh  
 Secretary Assistant-Civil Registration, Damascus
10. Mr. Majed Al Shareef  
 Director-Civil Affairs, Suburbs of Damascus
11. Mr. Khalid Slaan,  
 Secretary-Civil Registration, Qunietra
12. Mr. Youssef Awabdeh,  
 Secretary-Civil Registration Directorate, Sweida
13. Mr. Ahmad Sweid Al Saleh  
 Director-Civil Registration, Homs



14. Mr. Jihad Mustafa  
Director-Civil Registration Directorate, Hama
15. Mr. Abdel Razzak Souwai  
Secretary-Civil Registration Directorate, Hama
16. Mr. Mohamad Ghasan Johadar  
Director-Civil Registration Directorate, Aleppo
17. Mr. Faisal Al Bashir  
Secretary-Civil Registration Directorate, Aleppo
18. Mr. Abdel Rahman Elio  
Director-Civil Registration Directorate, Lattakia
19. Mr. Khaled Battal  
Assistant Secretary-Civil Registration Directorate, Idlib
20. Mr. Soubhi Sweidan  
Secretary-Civil Registration Directorate, Deir Azzor
21. Mr. Zaki Asskar  
Director, Civil Registration Affairs, Al Hassakeh
22. Mr. Hussein Ali  
Central Bureau of Statistics
23. Dr. Khalid Kilani  
Central Bureau of Statistics
24. Mrs. Hala Daass  
Central Bureau of Statistics
25. Mr. Abdel Fatah Nashawati  
Central Bureau of Statistics
26. Mr. Said Safadi  
Central Bureau of Statistics
27. Mrs. Hana Hussein  
State Planning Commission
28. Mr. Bassam Sibaa  
State Planning Commission

4. **Selected list of persons present in the opening ceremony of the workshop**

1. Mr. Mohammad Harba,  
Minister of Interior, Syrian Arab Republic
2. Mr. Sabah Bakjaji  
Under-Secretary-General, Executive-Secretary  
United Nations Economic and Social Commission  
for Western Asia  
Aman, Jordan
3. Mr. Danho Dawood  
Minister of State, Prime Minister's Office, Syria
4. Mr. Yihya Abou Asseleh  
Minister of Local Administration, Syria
5. Mr. Kyaw Lwin Hla  
Resident Representative  
United Nations Development Programme
6. Mr. Tawfik Issmail  
Assistant-Minister for Planning Affairs, Syria
7. Mr. Kassem Mikdad  
Assistant-Minister for Planning Affairs, Syria
8. Mr. Chafic Sallah  
Representative, United Nations Children's Fund
9. Mr. Diab Sahioun  
Country Director, United Nations Population Fund
10. Mr. Bassam Sibai  
Director of Scientific and Technical  
Cooperation, Syria
11. Mr. Abdel Munem Hamawi  
Mayor of Quneitra, Syria
12. Mr. Walid Hammamieh  
Mayor of Damascus, Syria
13. Mr. Ali Zayoud  
Mayor of Damascus-Suburbs, Syria
14. Dr. Ziad Shwiki  
President, University of Damascus, Syria

## ANNEX 3

### LIST OF TECHNICAL PAPERS

1. Provisional agenda (WAW/CRVS/93/1)
2. Agenda (WAW/CRVS/93/1 add.1, add. 2)
3. List of workshop participants (WAW/CRVS/93/2)
4. List of technical papers (WAW/CRVS/93/3)
5. The International Programme for Accelerating the Improvement of Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems (United Nations Statistical Division and Others) (WAW/CRVS/93/4)
6. Outline for preparing a country report on the current status of civil registration and vital statistics systems (United Nations Statistical Division) (WAW/CRVS/93/5)
7. Review and assessment of the national civil registration and vital statistics systems (United Nations Statistical Division) (WAW/CRVS/93/6)
8. Current Status of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems-Strategies for Improvement: Egypt (WAW/CRVS/93/7)
9. Current Status of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems-Strategies for Improvement: Iraq (WAW/CRVS/93/8)
10. Current Status of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems-Strategies for Improvement: Jordan (WAW/CRVS/93/9)
11. Current Status of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems-Strategies for Improvement: Kuwait (WAW/CRVS/93/10)
12. Current Status of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems-Strategies for Improvement: Lebanon (WAW/CRVS/93/11)
13. Current Status of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems-Strategies for Improvement: Sultanate of Oman (WAW/CRVS/93/12)
14. Current Status of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems-Strategies for Improvement: Palestine (WAW/CRVS/93/13)
15. Current Status of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems-Strategies for Improvement: Qatar (WAW/CRVS/93/14)
16. Current Status of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems-Strategies for Improvement: Saudi Arabia (WAW/CRVS/93/15)
17. Current Status of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems-Strategies for Improvement: Syrian Arab Republic (WAW/CRVS/93/16)

18. Current Status of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems-Strategies for Improvement: United Arab Emirates (WAW/CRVS/93/17)
19. Current Status of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems-Strategies for Improvement: Republic of Yemen (WAW/CRVS/93/18)
20. Modern Technology for storage and retrieval of civil registration records and processing of vital statistics (United Nations Statistical Division) (WAW/CRVS/93/19)
21. Danish Experience with computerisation of civil registration (Datacentralen, Denmark) (WAW/CRVS/93/20)
22. Register-based vital statistics. Issues to consider. Some Danish experiences (Danmarks Statistik, Denmark) (WAW/CRVS/93/21)
23. Uses of vital records and statistics in development programs (International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics) (WAW/CRVS/93/23)
24. Uses of civil registration and vital statistics in health programs and services (WHO-Geneva and WHO-Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean) (WAW/CRVS/93/24)
25. Uses of vital statistics in demographic analysis (Statistics Division, ESCWA) (WAW/CRVS/93/25)
26. Uses of vital statistics in demographic analysis: the case of Egypt (Cairo Demographic Center) (WAW/CRVS/93/26)
27. Other data collection methods and techniques providing vital statistics and rates (United Nations Statistical Division) (WAW/CRVS/93/27)
28. National commitment to an improvement programme of civil registration and vital statistics systems: Argentina (National Institute of Statistics and Census Argentina) (WAW/CRVS/93/28)
29. Current status of civil registration and vital statistics systems and suggestions for improvement in Western Asia (Statistics Division-ESCWA) (WAW/CRVS/93/29)
30. Civil Registration and population registers in the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan (UNFPA Regional Office of the Country Support Team of the Arab States) (WAW/CRVS/93/30)
31. Automated system for registering live births, generating statistical tables and issuing the report (LIVE) (WAW/CRVS/93/31)

**ANNEX 4****LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC**

**To His Excellency Hafez Al-Asad,  
President of the Syrian Arab Republic**

The participants in the workshop on Strategies for Accelerating the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems held in Damascus ( 20 - 24 June 1993 ) in cooperation with the ministry of the Interior, the Statistical Division of the United Nations, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), and the Central Bureau of Statistics would like to express to your Excellency their gratitude and appreciation and at the same time salute the tremendous efforts being made in all fields in your country and which have made Syria an outstanding example of self-reliant development.

It was very gratifying that this meeting in which numerous professionals, experts and consultants in civil registration and vital statistics systems took part, be held in the ancient and historic city of Damascus. The participants appreciate the warm welcome and generous hospitality extended to them.

The hosting of this workshop in Damascus confirms your keen and constant desire to patronize science and scientists and derive benefit from the experiences of other countries and the advanced methods in the fields of statistics and development.

Greatly impressed by the important achievements of the Syrian Arab Republic under your leadership, we wish your Excellency permanent good health and your hospitable country success and prosperity.

**The participants in the workshop on Strategies  
for Accelerating the Improvement of  
Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems**

