

**United Nations Expert Group Meeting to Review the Handbook on
Geographic Databases and Census Mapping**

New York, 7-10 April 2008

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Dear colleagues,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to this Expert Group Meeting organized by the United Nations Statistics Division. I would like to thank you for sparing some time out of your busy schedules to participate in this meeting.

As you are aware, and I would like to reiterate, the purpose of the meeting is to critically and objectively review the revised draft of the United Nations *Handbook on geographic information systems and digital mapping*, now provisionally re-titled the *Handbook on Geographical Databases and Census Mapping*.

I should mention that in 2000, the United Nations *Handbook on geographic information systems and digital mapping* was issued for use during the 2000 round of population and housing censuses. The Handbook has so far provided useful guidance in the field of census cartography; however, it needs updating and reviewing to take into account recent developments in geospatial technologies. In addition, updates and reviews with respect to approaches in the use of geo-spatial applications for statistical exercises in general, and population and housing censuses, in particular. I am pleased to report that these developments have been reflected in the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 2* which was adopted by the Statistical Commission in March 2007.

Subsequent to the adoption of the revised *Principles and Recommendations* UNSD initiated a series of activities to promote and support *the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses* taking into account the

technological advances. For example, in May 2007, the UNSD organized an Expert Group Meeting on Contemporary Practices in *Census Mapping and Use of Geographical Information Systems* in New York, whose major goal was to provide input into the revision of the Handbook I referred to earlier. I am pleased to note that many of you participated in that meeting. Furthermore, the United Nations Statistics Division, conducted in the fall of 2007 and early in 2008 five workshops on the use of geospatial technologies in census mapping operations: **two** in Africa the first was for the English-speaking and the second was for the French-speaking countries; **one** workshop was conducted for Asian countries; **one** for the Caribbean region; and the **fifth one** for the Pacific islands. All these workshops were well received. This has encouraged my Division to conduct more census related workshops during the 2010 round of censuses.

The recommendations of the EGM and the regional workshops on GIS and census mapping emphasized the need for countries to take the use of census geography programmes as a continuous process, rather than the sequential mapping and dissemination operations. It was emphasized that the use and application of contemporary geo-spatial technologies and geographical databases is beneficial at all the stages of population and housing census process. For instance they improve the efficiency in the preparatory, enumeration, processing and dissemination phases of the census. They also called upon the United Nations Statistics Division with other United Nations agencies to compile lessons learned on the advantages as well as limitations of different technologies and facilitate the development of guidelines for national statistical organizations.

In this regard, it is important that the Handbook put into the hands of census planners and related personnel a technical guide on the contemporary methods, tools, and best practices that would enable them to better articulate their needs and deal with census mapping operations more efficiently. In my view the handbook needs to clearly cover two broad aspects, in appreciable detail: managerial, by addressing organizational and institutional issues which are the concerns for

statistical agency heads and other managers, and operational, by explicitly addressing technical and practical issues which are the concerns of census cartographers and takers.

Dear Colleagues,

Let me now summarize the main challenges this revised edition should address:

- Ways and means of harnessing the enormous potential of geospatial technologies and make operational their use in order to support and improve census mapping operations;
- How to construct a digital enumeration area level database for the census and use of geographic databases to create maps for enumeration, and for post-censal dissemination of results and analysis;
- How to develop and use GIS and other geospatial technologies and applications for integrating statistical data with other geographic information for such applications as disaster management and preparedness and other spatial phenomena;
- Ways and means to build and harness institutional collaboration through the vehicle of spatial data infrastructures in order to collect and share geographic data, and carry out various spatial and statistical analysis.

I urge you to illustrate all these areas by concrete examples and corroborated by best practices carried out by countries. I am confident that you as experts will come up with an instructive and informative handbook that will assist countries not only to choose the right approaches but to apply the geospatial technologies correctly in order to generate value added and reliable census data.

Let me conclude by expressing, once again, my appreciation for your participation and assuring you that my staff and I are committed to assisting you to make this meeting a success. I wish you a very productive and successful meeting.

Thank you