

**United Nations Expert Group Meeting on Measuring the Economically Active
Population in Censuses (New York, 5-9 November 2007)**

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Dear colleagues,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to this Expert Group Meeting organized by the United Nations Statistics Division in collaboration with the Bureau of Statistics of the ILO. I would like to thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedules to participate in this meeting. As you are aware the meeting is dedicated to the review of a draft handbook on the Measurement of Economically Active Population in Censuses. This is one of the handbooks being produced to support the activities of the *2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses*.

At the outset, I must state that the measurement of economically active population in censuses is important but also challenging. For many countries, especially the developing countries, a census is perhaps the only vehicle used to collect and produce such statistics with a possibility of presenting the results for the small administrative domains. A census is usually, a complex and massive operation involving many data collectors, covering many equally important subjects and carried out within a very limited time frame. This precludes the inclusion of many items, including probing questions, in a census questionnaire pertaining to one single topic. The critical question, therefore, is how can we determine the bare minimum number of questions on economically active population that can generate the required information for planning and decision making in a country?

In our deliberations, it is important that we take cognizance that a population census is one source for collecting data on economically active population a country can exploit. Other sources include labour force and other household surveys; establishment/business censuses and surveys; and to some extent administrative records. The critical challenge is to determine how best to utilize the census to capture the necessary information, taking into consideration the body of existing and potential data from sources other than population censuses.

Another challenge is that the handbook on economic characteristics should amplify the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*, adopted, in March this year, by the Statistical Commission. This implies that the handbook should be hands on document which census planners and takers can easily use as a technical guide.

The main objectives of this meeting, therefore, are:

- To elaborate on and make operational the already internationally recommended concepts and standards pertaining to the measurement of economic characteristics of the population;
- To give and review some illustrative examples of questions used, in censuses, to facilitate the collection of information on economic characteristics. Pointing out their limitations if any; and
- To propose good practice procedures for collection and processing the relevant information.

In this regard the handbook needs to be operational such that countries can easily use it as they plan and conduct censuses that include the enumeration of the economically active population. In addition, the handbook should give data processing guidelines. In this connection, I expect a document that will have sufficient detail that would guide countries in implementing concepts, standards and methods presented in the revised *Principles and Recommendation*. I am aware that this task is not easy because one of the difficult topics to measure in censuses that of economic characteristics of the population. I am confident that you as experts will come up with an instructive handbook.

Let me conclude by thanking you for participating in this important meeting and for your continued support to this endeavour as we implement the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses. I can see you have a long agenda before you. I wish you a good meeting.

Thank you.