

**United Nations Expert Group Meeting to Review Critical Issues Relevant to the  
Planning of the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses**

United Nations Statistics Division

New York, 15-17 September 2004

**Report of the Expert Group Meeting to Review Critical Issues Relevant to the  
Planning of the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses\***

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## **A. Introduction**

### **Background and objective of the Meeting**

1. The United Nations Expert Group Meeting to Review Critical Issues Relevant to the Planning of the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses was convened in New York on 15-17 September 2004. The meeting was organized by the Demographic and Social Statistics Branch of the United Nations Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The Expert Group Meeting was convened in response to the Statistical Commission's recommendation, at its thirty-fifth session, on the establishment of an international expert group to focus on critical issues related to planning the next round of population and housing censuses.
2. The objectives, among others, of the meeting were to (i) set priorities and propose concrete outputs for the development of the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme, with a view to presenting it to the thirty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission for action; and (ii) establish terms of reference outlining role of the Expert Group in relation to the above mentioned Programme (for an elaborated statement of the purpose of the meeting, see information flyer for the Expert Group meeting, attached as Appendix 1).
3. The meeting was attended by representatives from 18 countries: Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Egypt, India, Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Jamaica, Japan, Mexico, Oman, Peru, South Africa, Thailand, United Kingdom and the United States; four United Nations regional commissions: Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), and Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA); and 14 organizations and institutions: Caribbean Community Secretariat (CARICOM), the Statistical Office of the European Communities (EUROSTAT), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Inter American Development Bank, Mercado Común del Sur (MERCOSUR), Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), UNESCO Institute for Statistics, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Population Division, United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, United Nations Division for Social Policy and Development, United Nations Statistics Division, Washington Group on Disability Statistics, and the World Bank. The list of participants is in Appendix 2.

### **Opening session**

4. The meeting was opened by Mr. Paul Cheung, Director of the United Nations Statistics Division. In his opening statement, Mr. Cheung summarized the conclusions reached in the United Nations Census Symposium on Population and Housing Censuses (13-14 September 2004, New York) and invited the group to set concrete guidelines for the 2010 round of censuses.
5. On the basis of the relevant issues for the 2010 census round highlighted by the United Nations Symposium on Population and Housing Censuses, Ms. Mary Chamie, Chief of the Demographic and Social Statistics Branch, United Nations Statistics Division listed the issues for consideration in the meeting such as defining a core data set for censuses, setting of the terms of reference of the Expert Group Meeting, review of alternative census approaches, use of information technology and possible revision and updating of the United Nations *Principles and recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*. In addition, she expressed the need to define activities and set up a working plan on specific topics related to the 2010 round of censuses.

## Organization of the Meeting

6. As laid out in the Organization of Work (Appendix 3), the meeting was structured along the following main topics:

- Emerging issues and core topics;
- Alternative approaches to traditional census taking;
- Reviewing national experience and lessons learned in the use of information technology; Promotion, usage and dissemination of census results;
- Delineation of priorities and terms of reference for the Expert Group on the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses (2005-2014).

7. A number of papers were presented under each topic (see Appendix 3 for the list of papers). The presentations were followed by an open discussion. Background papers contributed by participants provided additional information and enriched the discussion. The papers are available on the United Nations Statistics Division website.<sup>1</sup>

8. Discussions were structured in a way that progressively led towards the development of the Expert Group's final recommendations and the adoption of the terms of reference for the Expert Group on the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses.

9. The meeting was co-chaired by Ms. Jane Badets of Canada, Ms. Susan Linacre of Australia, Ms. Valerie Nam of Jamaica and Mr. Sigeru Kawasaki of Japan. The Rapporteur for the meeting was Mr. Peter O. Way of the United States of America.

## B. Summary of discussions

10. The summary below is organized by topic and highlights salient issues that emerged during the discussions.

### Emerging issues and core topics

11. With regard to emerging issues and core topics, the deliberations focused on three main areas: (1) the possible role of population censuses in collecting data on topics of emerging social and policy concern; (2) the need for and feasibility of establishing a set of core census topics that would be common to all countries; and (3) whether and how the United Nations *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 1* should be revised or updated to take these two issues into account.

12. The United Nations Statistics Division presented a paper noting that in recent years there is increased attention and demand, by countries and other interested stakeholders, for quality statistics on a variety of topics, including: persons according to their usual residence; population movement within and outside national borders; education and literacy; labour; characteristics of families, households and living arrangements; ethnicity and indigenous persons; fertility;

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<sup>1</sup> [http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/meetings/egm/CensusEGM04/list\\_of\\_docs.htm](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/meetings/egm/CensusEGM04/list_of_docs.htm)

mortality; ageing; and human functioning and disability. Experts deliberated on practicability of collecting data in a census on some topics such as maternal mortality, deaths due to HIV/AIDS, and disability taking into account differences in practices among countries regarding sources of data on such topics. In this regard, it was noted that for many countries the census may be the main source of demographic and social statistics, while in some countries data on these same topics are from either administrative registers or are collected through specialized sample surveys.

13. Australia made a presentation on topics of emerging policy relevance being considered by the Australian Bureau of Statistics for inclusion in their next population census, in particular disability. Australia also referred to topics where the increasing mobility of the population, and the changing arrangement of families and households were giving rise to a need to reconsider aspects of topics. Of particular interest were issues related to place of usual residence and migration. The presentation pointed to the need for an internationally consistent and easy to operationalize definition of residence to support the concept of estimated resident population. With regard to disability, Australia has reliable survey data at the national and state level. However due, in part, to the need for small area statistics, which cannot be obtained from surveys, Australia plans to collect data on disability in coming censuses.

14. A representative of the Washington Group on Disability Statistics shared with the meeting the process of deliberations and consultations taking place with regard to the development of a set of core census questions to measure human functioning and disability. Use of a common approach to questions is intended to strengthen the international comparability of statistics in this area.

15. ESCWA's presentation on emerging issues for the region highlighted concerns with regard to census topics and the need to improve definitions, concepts and measurement of economic characteristics of the population, with special emphasis on unemployment. Other emerging critical issues to be considered in census-taking in the ESCWA region include measurement of human functioning and disability, education and literacy, and information and communications technologies (ICT). In general, ESCWA underscored the need for countries to use internationally agreed definitions, concepts, standards and classifications in formulating census questions and in tabulating census data.

16. During the discussion, experts pointed out the differences between regions as well as countries in the relevance and importance of the emerging topics on the one hand, and in the sources from which the data on these topics are obtained on the other hand. The meeting drew attention to the consequences, for data quality, of using the census to collect data on complex topics that are best investigated either through sample surveys or administrative registration systems. The choice of census topics was identified as a critical and important issue as it has implications on the cost, purpose and to some extent success of the census exercise. In this regard, the experts noted the negative consequences of overloading the census with unnecessary census topics including those for which data were not much used, and stressed that too much data from an over-burdened census questionnaire requires much more time to process and disseminate, resulting in untimely release of census results. Consequently, the discussion focused on the need to provide criteria for determining a set of topics suitable for censuses in view of different national circumstances.

17. The experts also deliberated on the need for revising and updating the current *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* in order to provide common approaches in terms of definitions, concepts, and classifications so as to improve the international

comparability of census data. The discussion also focused on whether or not census topics in the revised document should be expanded to include international guidelines on the newly emerging topics for use by countries that choose to investigate these topics in a census.

18. Another area, related to the revision of the *Principles and Recommendations*, which was brought up by the experts related to engendering concepts, definitions and classifications so as to improve the production of statistics that reflect and take into account gender issues in society. Engendering concepts, definitions and classifications would entail, for example, use of language and words that would minimize biased reporting by gender, such as that associated with reporting of female employment.

19. Given the importance of improved harmonization and comparability of statistics at the international level, the experts considered the need to identify a core and essential list of census topics, based on uniform concepts, for which data can be produced and supplied by national statistical/census offices in the shortest possible time. Experts pointed out, however, that due to the diversity between countries in approaches to the collection of demographic and social data, emphasis should be on identifying a core set of outputs or datasets. It was decided that an essential core set of outputs should be defined among the broad range of demographic and social topics irrespective of the data source, i.e., censuses, sample surveys, administrative recording systems or variants and combinations of these. It was also agreed that irrespective of the data sources for the core set of outputs, international guidelines are needed in order to ensure harmonization of data from different sources with respect to concepts, definitions and classifications.

20. It was recognized, however, that depending on national data needs and priorities, some countries would collect data on additional topics and hence have more outputs in order to meet the needs of their policy makers. Decisions on what to collect and produce would depend on such factors as: (i) consultations with stakeholders and data users' needs; (ii) the level of disaggregation of the results necessary for information-based decision making process; (iii) testing of new topics and questions; (iv) the use of alternative sources of information to the census; (v) the need for historically comparable data; (vi) the estimated effectiveness of data processing and dissemination; (vii) experiences in regard to the relationship of the number of questions and the level of non-response; (viii) issues related to cultural differences, and characteristics of the respondents and enumerators, such as educational level and literacy, that have an impact on the enumeration and quality of data being collected.

### **Alternative approaches to traditional census taking**

21. The United Nations Statistics Division presented an overview of alternative approaches to a traditional census. Alternative census approaches which were explored included those that use a short form every 10 years and carry out annual large-scale surveys during the inter-censal period; the population register-based census; the administrative records/register-based supplemented by results from sample surveys and the rotating census which is solely based on the conduct of annual large-scale sample surveys. The meeting was informed that the alternative approaches were being adopted because of concerns with the traditional census approach with respect to prohibitive costs, lack of timeliness of results, inflexibility and, in some cases, questionable data quality. The presentation raised the following questions: Is there a need to redefine the census in view of the varied approaches? What are the prerequisites for adopting each of the alternative designs? To what extent do these designs meet the data needs of countries? What are the implications of these designs in term of privacy and confidentiality? How should

these approaches be reflected in the updated United Nations *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*?

22. The US Bureau of the Census made a presentation on the Re-engineered Population and Housing Census. The meeting was informed that the adoption of this design was driven by an interest in: improving coverage, accuracy and timeliness; reducing operational risks; and containing costs. The approach includes the decennial census based on a short form, American Community Survey (ACS) and the updating of the master address file. The ACS will replace the traditional decennial long form covering such topics as income, occupation and migration.

23. The presentation of Peru highlighted the influence of the high cost associated with the traditional census which led the country to consider adopting an alternative approach for the next census round. For example financial constraints led to the cancellation of the census in 2003. In order to meet this challenge Peru is considering the adoption of a combination of a short form and a programme of annual large-scale surveys.

24. Israel is opting for a register-based census approach linked with sample survey results. This approach is being adopted based on cost consideration. One function of the sample survey will be to provide information that will allow register errors to be compensated for in preparing the final estimates.

25. Mexico is planning to use a short form and a number of concomitant thematic surveys (long form approach during the 2010) while introducing modelling at the analytical stage.

26. The experts made general and specific comments on the alternative census approaches including the fact that there was lack of adequate experience to fully evaluate the practicability of the alternative approaches to traditional censuses. It was also pointed out that while some countries have good population register systems, they may not be used for statistical purposes for fear of creating the perception among those providing the information that their individual records are being accessed for non-statistical purposes. The experts pointed out that for some countries the data users may be ambivalent in accepting estimates based on moving averages when they are accustomed to fixed period estimates. Some experts emphasized the importance of small area statistics generated through the traditional census which may not be obtainable through a census based on annual sample surveys. It was argued, in this context, that the credibility of the census process may be at stake. Issues were raised about sources of data for alternative census designs which were not under the statistical systems, notably administrative records. This raised the problem of how the national statistical system can influence the quality of statistics produced from such a system. The meeting was also reminded that the basis for adopting some of the alternative approaches had long history, for instance, the population registers have been in existence for a long time, sometimes 200 or 300 years. People in countries which use them are generally literate and there are strong incentives for registering and updating the information. For many less developed countries, registration systems do not exist and even when they do, they are usually incomplete. It was also pointed out that some alternative approaches, such as the use of annual large-scale sample surveys, presuppose availability of good sampling frames, which may not be in existence for many countries.

27. The experts observed that use of alternative approaches to census taking had broad implications for how data can be interpreted and used. In this context some general questions were raised, among them: Will users accept the validity of the new estimates? Is there need to educate and train users on how to use the new data generated through new census designs?

## **Reviewing national experience and lessons learned in the use of information technology**

28. Use of information technology (IT) in census activities has increased in recent decades due in part to its perceived benefits in terms of speeding up various census activities and its ability to minimize error and improve the quality and dissemination of census results. The session reviewed the use of information technology in censuses based on national experiences and lessons learned in the 2000 census round. The session provided valuable insights based on national examples, and important input to future international guidelines on the application of IT in censuses.

29. A representative of UNSD presented an overview of possible integration of global positioning system (GPS), digital imagery and geographic information system (GIS) in census mapping; enumeration tracking; and data dissemination.

30. The presentation by Oman focused on the introduction, in one governorate, of handheld devices for enumeration during the 2003 national census. The review of this experience pointed out both the advantages as well as challenges associated with their use. Of interest is the fact that use of handheld devices resulted in quicker downloading of the collected information into the general database. This Omani experience also provided an example of outsourcing related to use of IT in census operations, as well as the challenges involved and how to overcome them.

31. The representative of Japan presented his country's experience in census taking, focusing on four main points. Firstly, the geographic information system that was implemented for the first time in the 1990 census was being expanded in the subsequent censuses, and the computerized mapping of the enumeration district maps is expected to cover approximately 85 per cent of all enumeration districts in the 2005 census, which will improve the quality and efficiency of the mapping work. Secondly, in regard to the optical character reading that was implemented for the first time in the 2000 census, emphasis was placed on the necessity of careful testing and field control to ensure clearly written responses from respondents, which are essential in achieving high accuracy recognition. Thirdly, in data dissemination of the small area statistics by geographic information system, necessity to consider the group privacy issues was pointed out. Finally, advantages and obstacles to introducing internet response system in census data collection presented.

32. Other national examples related to applications of information technology in census operations, such as use of global positioning systems (GPS), aerial and satellite photography and digitalized mapping in the area of mapping; use of handheld devices, cell phones, and internet-based administered questionnaires in the area of data collection; use of scanning technology for data capture; use of GIS; and implementation of user-friendly databases and warehousing on the internet in the area of data dissemination. Other examples of IT application included the creation of national address databases used as frames during data collection exercises and use of the Internet during the census preparatory stages. It was generally recognized that IT is significantly changing and influencing population and housing census taking, analysis and dissemination of census results.

33. During the discussion, experts considered the advantages of using IT in census operations, but also raised some concerns regarding its use in certain activities. On the positive side, experts pointed out that the use of GPS, for example, improves the quality of census maps in terms of precision and makes it easier to update the maps at a later stage since coordinates of mapped areas are electronically stored. Likewise, the use of handheld devices allows for quicker downloading and consistency check of the collected raw data, thereby improving the management

of field operations. The experts also cited gains in efficiency at the data processing stage due to the use of scanning equipment, either optical mark reading (OMR) or optical character recognition (OCR) which makes faster data capture compared to traditional keying of data. The discussion also revealed that IT can be a useful tool for recoding national classifications, based on the national systems and needs, to conform to international classifications, which are crucial for cross-country comparability of data.

34. The experts, however, raised some concern regarding the use of IT in censuses. One such concern was the costs involved. For example, it was pointed out that satellite imagery as well as digital mapping are very expensive and require highly trained personnel. Likewise, use of scanning equipment requires initial investment in the machinery and there may not be sufficient use for the machines during the intercensal period. Use of IT sometime involves outsourcing which may result in problems for the census operations if, for instance, the scientific standards are not met and time deadlines are not adhered to. This could happen, for instance, with handheld devices if the layout of the questionnaire, including skip patterns, are not logical due to use of moving screenings. Problems could also arise if the scanner cannot read the completed questionnaires. Other problems that were cited related to the fact that use of technology depends on the conditions in the country in question. For example, extreme weather conditions could affect use of handheld devices.

### **Promotion, usage and dissemination of census results**

35. The United Nations Statistics Division made two presentations: the first one related to concerns of the non-statistical use of census enumeration such as inclusion of registration of voters and the establishment of the population registers; and the second presentation analysed the state of reporting of national census results to the United Nations *Demographic Yearbook* in the light of resolution 1995/7 on the 2000 World Population and Housing Census Programme, which calls upon Member States to provide census results to the United Nations and other appropriate intergovernmental organizations. This was followed by a video presentation by South Africa on various aspects of dissemination. The video highlighted the importance of the census as a source of information for policy and decision making, and reviewed some of the benefits of the use of information technology in the democratization of statistics. The video, however, illustrated that traditional forms of data dissemination, for example, in paper formats, may still be relevant in countries where ICT is not widely available. Experts from Israel, ECLAC and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community demonstrated how they have disseminated census data through the Internet. It was pointed out that the dissemination of data through the Internet allows users to customize their requests according to their needs.

36. In the deliberations that followed, it was stated that sometimes there is pressure on the national census office to use the census operations for non-statistical purposes. The meeting cautioned, however, that such an arrangement could have negative repercussions on the integrity of the census if the joint operations are not properly handled. Issues of confidentiality and public trust were among the concerns raised by the experts. Because of its complexity and sensitivity, and in light of the *Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics*<sup>2</sup>, non-statistical use of census enumeration was identified as a subject that needed further consideration by the Expert Group at its future meetings.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/goodprac/bpabout.asp>

37. With regard to the dissemination of census results, the meeting stressed the importance of the census as a source of information for policy and decision making and deliberated on the need to increase the value of a census in the production of valid and reliable socioeconomic information. The experts emphasized that dissemination of census data merits the highest priority in the 2010 census round and underscored the need for all the census processes to be planned and undertaken with the aim of maximizing the dissemination of census results.

38. To improve national reporting of census data to the *Demographic Yearbook* system, the experts proposed that the United Nations Statistics Division should explore more efficient means of obtaining national data from the countries' websites. With respect to improving the availability of data, the Expert Group meeting observed that it was becoming increasingly common for countries to provide census data free of charge to users. There was also great pressure for data providers to do so and in a timely manner, through the Internet, especially for basic statistics. Confidentiality issues were raised with respect to dissemination of census data, especially for small areas. The meeting highlighted the usefulness of international classifications as a basis for cross-country comparisons of data but recognized that countries may sometimes need to use their own classifications based on national systems and needs. Experts noted that the use of common software by different countries could facilitate the exchange of data among them. There was a general understanding in the meeting that training of users was required to improve and maximize the use of census data. It was also pointed out that as data users became more sophisticated and demanding, there was a need to include metadata with the statistics which are disseminated.

## **C. Conclusions and recommendations**

### **General recommendations**

39. The Expert Group called for the revision and updating, when needed, of the United Nations *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* for the 2010 census round and ensure the accomplishment of this task not later than 2008.

40. As part of the planning of the 2010 census round, the meeting called on the United Nations Statistics Division to facilitate the sharing of information and to provide guidance, through handbooks, manuals, newsletters, electronic exchange, meetings, workshops and the Statistics Division's website, on crucial and relevant issues on censuses for the benefit of national statistical offices. In this regard, the United Nations Statistics Division should revise and update relevant manuals on censuses.

41. It was also requested that the United Nations Statistics Division assist the Expert Group on the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses in identifying key statistical offices that could prepare critically needed technical reports on topics to be addressed.

42. Recognizing that outsourcing has become a common practice in census operations and in the use of IT, the experts called for the Expert Group on the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses to:

- i. Develop guidelines and criteria for drafting and designing terms of reference for outsourcing contracts pertaining to census operations, and for managing these contracts.

- ii. Facilitate effective exchange of national experiences in this regard.
43. The meeting urged for the preparation of guidelines on planning and management of censuses of process evaluation at various stages of census operations as well as guidelines related to the methodology for evaluating the quality of census results.
44. Considerable attention was given by the experts to the need of coordination and exchange of information on technical cooperation. The meeting requested the Expert Group on the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Census to recommend ways by which the United Nations Secretariat, the United Nations agencies and other relevant regional and sub-regional organizations can assist member states in terms of obtaining the necessary technical and financial support for the planning of specific census operations. In this regard, special emphasis was put on the active involvement of Members States and the establishment of a Trust Fund, to be coordinated by the United Nations Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, to ensure efficient and timely provision and exchange of services and information among Member States.
45. The Expert Group Meeting emphasized the need for Governments to ensure that the census is gender sensitive and that by revising the definitions, data disaggregated by gender become available. Such data are necessary in the formulation of gender policies at national and sub-national levels.

### **Emerging issues and core topics in censuses**

46. Regarding the emerging issues and the core topics in censuses, the experts made the following recommendations:
- i. The establishment of an expert subgroup with the aim of reviewing, updating or developing standards and frameworks (topics, concepts, definitions, classifications and methods) for both the essential core set of outputs and the broader set of topics of general interest and concern.
  - ii. The list of topics in the *Principles and Recommendations* should be revised to be as comprehensive as possible, taking into account different regional and national circumstances. Fully acknowledging that not all topics apply to all national statistical circumstances and that one size does not fit all, the experts proposed that the *Principles and Recommendations* should provide guidance on how to include topics in censuses according to national circumstances.
  - iii. The revised *Principles and Recommendations* should include a set of criteria that would guide national census authorities in determining the applicability as well as suitability of collecting data on individual topics through a census and also provide guidance on when alternative sources to censuses might be used.
  - iv. The *Principles and Recommendations* should provide guidance on the assessment of the level of disaggregation of the results needed so as to make a distinction between topics for which data are required at national/regional

levels and consider best practices in addressing statistical needs for small areas. In addition, the recommendations should propose alternative sources of data as well as the suitability of the use of short and long census forms for the selected topics, depending on level of detail required.

- v. The establishment of an expert subgroup to define an essential core set of outputs for obtaining demographic and socioeconomic statistics that a statistical system, including population and housing censuses, should deliver. This core set of outputs, which is not tied to any single source of data, shall reflect, as much as possible, the essential data needs of countries and permit international comparability of data based on common concepts, definitions, and classifications.

### **Alternative census designs**

47. The Expert Group meeting concluded that there was a need to thoroughly understand the implications of alternative census designs because there is still much to be learned. In addition, the experts pointed out that while the alternative approaches are gaining focus, there were many countries relying on traditional census methods, which are still reliable and cost-effective if properly done. It was therefore recommended that caution should be maintained in the revision of the Principles and Recommendations not to overstress alternative approaches, because this could be interpreted by some policy makers and national budget authorities as a sign that the conventional census is no longer an efficient method. In this regard, the meeting concluded that many countries still relied on the traditional census approach and recommended that:

- i. The United Nations Statistics Division should serve as a clearing house for information on alternative census designs and as a repository of metadata for reporting on shifts in census approaches.
- ii. A working group should be established to develop guidelines which would help countries in adopting alternative census designs. This should include giving both the advantages and disadvantages of each design. The work should include elaboration on minimum prerequisites for the successful implementation of each alternative census design. In this regard, the United Nations Statistics Division with the assistance of the Expert Group on the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses should identify institutions which could play leading roles in developing guidelines for the application of specific alternative census designs.
- iii. An expert subgroup should be established to review the section, on the “uses in an integrated programme of data collection and compilation”, of the 1998 United Nations Principles and *Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*. The group will review statistical units and frameworks and provide guidelines on the role of population, housing, establishment and agricultural censuses in an integrated system of statistics.

- iv. A technical team should be formed to develop guidelines on the use of administrative data for statistical purposes in order to ensure confidentiality with the use of this source.
- v. A series of workshops should be organized on various aspects of alternative census designs, as new information becomes available.
- vi. A review should be made of the implications of register-based censuses on the development of frames for national sample surveys.

### **The use of information technology**

48. As part of the review and discussion on the use of IT in national censuses, the experts recommended that:

- i. The Expert Group on the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses should produce detailed guidelines on the application of IT in census operations, highlighting advantages and disadvantages. The guidelines should also provide an assessment of the appropriateness of the various applications of IT for censuses in different national circumstances, as well as on how to manage the outsourcing of IT in census activities.
- ii. In deciding on what type of IT to apply and for what census operations, countries should carefully weigh the potential benefits and drawbacks of each application. Furthermore, its implementation should be carried out gradually and incrementally according to a set of priorities.
- iii. There were clear advantages in establishing, among countries, an exchange of experiences, equipment, software, including training of staff and support, in the field of IT. The United Nations Statistics Division should facilitate such exchanges.
- iv. The United Nations Statistics Division should update existing manuals related to use of IT in census-taking operations taking into consideration the lessons learnt from the 2000 census round and the latest developments in the field.

### **Promotion, usage and dissemination of census results**

49. The Expert Group made the following recommendations regarding the promotion, usage and dissemination of census results:

- i. There is need for future meetings to consider the merits and demerits of the use of census activities for non statistical purposes, taking cognisance of the *Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics* with respect to consequences on confidentiality and public trust.

- ii. An expert subgroup should be established to prepare guidelines on dissemination of census results and public relations, with the goal of “making value visible” in censuses. This will include, among others, guidelines on the planning of outputs, on preparation of brochures and other announcements of data availability, and on ways to improve electronic exchange of outputs. Such guidelines should also provide methods on how to maintain data confidentiality especially when disseminating individual and small area statistics.
- iii. In order to increase the level of reporting of census data by countries, to the *Demographic Yearbook* system, the United Nations Statistics Division was requested to explore the availability of requisite data on national websites. They also recommended that the United Nations Statistics Division should coordinate the multiple data requests by various United Nations agencies in order to reduce duplicate and overlapping requests to countries. This move would reduce the response burden on countries.
- iv. Workshops or meetings on usage of census results should be organized to help to enhance the value of census data by training users at different levels and perspectives. Such users are likely to provide crucial feedback for the planning of future censuses.

## **Annex. Terms of Reference for the Expert Group on the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses**

### **Background**

1. At its 35<sup>th</sup> session, the Statistical Commission recommended that an international expert group be formed to focus on critical issues related to planning the next round of population and housing censuses. Recognizing that the United Nations Statistics Division decennial census programme cannot cover all emerging topics, the Commission asked the expert group to set priorities at its first meeting. The main purpose of this expert group was to set concrete outputs for the development of the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme.

### **Role of the Expert Group**

2. The role of the Expert Group in planning the 2010 World Programme of Population and Housing Censuses is to:
- i. Review and ensure the updating of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*, incorporating the completed work from tasks described below.
  - ii. Formulate an essential core set of outputs of demographic and socio-economic information that population and housing censuses and/or other statistical systems should deliver. This core set of outputs shall reflect, as much as possible, the essential data needs of countries and permit international comparability of data.
  - iii. Review and update topics, standards, concepts, definitions and methods. The goal of the Expert Group would be to update or develop standards and frameworks (topics, concepts, definitions, classifications and methods) relevant for both the essential core set and the broader set of topics of general interest and concern.
  - iv. Encourage countries, as far as is feasible within the national statistical context, to focus on the essential core set of outputs as relevant for censuses, and use surveys and administrative systems for other essential data, if not included in the national census.
  - v. Prepare guidelines on planning and management of census process evaluation, and describe the best practices for evaluation at various stages of census operations, as well as guidelines related to the methodology (including Post Enumeration Surveys) for evaluating the quality of the census results.
  - vi. Define the pre-requisites, guidelines and criteria suitable for adopting alternative census designs and sources, emphasizing that these alternative approaches are not applicable in all national circumstances. Among others, this shall include a comparison of the several sources and approaches, along

- with guidelines for the combination of different sources and approaches to ensure the scientific delivery of outputs.
- vii. Review statistical units and statistical frameworks. To provide guidelines on the role of population, housing, establishment, and agricultural censuses in an integrated system of statistics.
  - viii. Explain and provide guidelines on the options available in the use of information technology (IT), in all stages of the census process. The guidelines shall aim at ensuring the scientific delivery of census outputs, the efficient exchange of data, and shall provide guidelines on the use of metadata on IT for monitoring purposes.
  - ix. Develop and facilitate international exchange and sharing of materials, resources and information on the use of IT, to promote effective operations and reliable outputs at all stages of the census.
  - x. Develop guidelines and criteria for drafting and designing terms of reference for outsourcing contracts pertaining to census operations, and for managing these contracts. Facilitate effective exchange of national experiences in this regard. The guidelines should also address critical issues such as privacy, confidentiality and accuracy.
  - xi. Prepare guidelines on dissemination and public relations, with the goal of “making value visible” in censuses. This will include, among others, guidelines on the planning of outputs, preparation of brochures and other announcements of data availability, and provide ways for improving of electronic exchange of outputs.
  - xii. The expert group and the associated working groups should consider in their work the related activities carried out in other regions toward the 2010 round of censuses and should make sure that the regional views are taken into consideration when drafting the *Principles and Recommendations*. This would ensure that the consultation process is as wide as possible, avoid duplication and lead to a more efficient use of the existing census resources.
  - xiii. Coordinate and exchange information about technical cooperation. Recommend ways by which the United Nations and the United Nations agencies can assist Member States in terms of attaining the necessary technical and financial support for the planning of specific census operations, with special emphasis on the active involvement of Members States and the establishment of a Trust Fund by the United Nations Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs to ensure efficient and timely provision of exchange of services and information to Member States in conducting censuses. This shall include the involvement of agencies and donors that would be in a position to contribute to providing technical and financial resources to countries.

## Process

3. The Expert Group on the 2010 Census Round will:
  - i. Submit these terms of reference to the Statistical Commission for approval at its 36th session.
  - ii. Use specialized working groups and related activities of regional Commissions to decide on the technical matters described above in points 2 to 11 of the role of the Expert Group<sup>3</sup>, and others as needed. The working groups will report to the Expert Group, which in turn will reach conclusions and provide specific recommendations for action to the Statistical Commission.
  - iii. Ensure transparency and cooperation in all phases of the working groups, seeking feedback from and taking into consideration developments in different regions of the world.
  - iv. The outcome of these working groups shall be considered by the Expert Group with the aim of deciding on which recommendations will be incorporated in the revision and updating of the Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses (point 1).

## Timing

4. The Expert Group on the 2010 World Programme on Populations and Housing Censuses shall determine the timing of the different outputs, depending on the amount of work and level of consultation needed. The United Nations Statistics Division will act as Secretariat to the Expert Group. The Expert Group has requested that the preliminary planning for setting up the working groups be initiated by the United Nations Statistics Division as soon as possible, taking into consideration the need to:
  - i. Provide information to member states at the earliest possible time in regard to the work of the Regional Commissions and other working groups and to make draft materials widely available through multiple means, including electronic distribution and posting at the United Nations Statistics Division website, prior to finalization.
  - ii. Submit the draft update of *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* for approval by the Statistical Commission, at its 38th session (March 2007). The updating of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* shall be finalized, in all United Nations languages, not later than 2008.

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<sup>3</sup> Points 12 and 13 will be part of the essential planning of the Expert Group on the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses.

## Appendix 1. Information flyer for the United Nations Expert Group Meeting to Review Critical Issues Relevant to the Planning of the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses



### United Nations Expert Group Meeting to Review Critical Issues Relevant to the Planning of the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses

15-17 September 2004, New York

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs  
Statistics Division - Demographic and Social Statistics Branch

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#### Purpose

At its 35<sup>th</sup> session, the Statistical Commission recommended that an international expert group be formed to focus on critical issues related to planning the next round of population and housing censuses. Recognizing that the United Nations Statistics Division decennial census programme cannot cover all emerging topics, the Commission has asked the expert group to set priorities at its first meeting<sup>1</sup>.

The purpose of the expert group meeting, therefore, is to set priorities and propose concrete outputs for the development of the 2010 World Population and Housing census Programme. Specifically the meeting will have before it relevant sections of the report of the 35<sup>th</sup> session of the Statistical Commission (see E/2004/24, chap. II. B, para. 2) as well as the draft resolution on the 2010 census round that will be submitted by the Census Symposium to the Statistical Commission at its 36<sup>th</sup> session. As the first in a series of meetings, the expert group will also establish terms of reference outlining its mandate in relation to the above mentioned Programme.

#### Sessions

1. Emerging issues and core topics: In recent years countries have called for improved statistics on a variety of issues, including, fertility, mortality, international migration, education, labour, health, characteristics of families, households and living arrangements, persons according to their usual residence, the foreign-born and disability (E/2004/24, chap. II. B, para. 2 (b), i). How will the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*<sup>2</sup> be modified to address these emerging issues? What are the core topics which may be included in censuses?
2. Alternative approaches to traditional census taking: Conventionally censuses have been characterized by individual enumeration, universality within a defined territory; simultaneity and defined periodicity (see *Principles and Recommendations*, paras. 1.1-1.10). To what extent should the *Principles and Recommendations* be updated to take into account alternative approaches? What are the key features of various approaches to census taking, which should be included in a census metadata system (E/2004/24, chap. II? B, para. 2 (b), vii)?
3. Strengthening the promotion and dissemination of census results: What are some of

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the strategies that could be developed to assist countries in meeting their own local, regional and national planning needs while also addressing the need for comparative data across countries and regions of the world (E/2004/24, chap. II. B, para. 2 (b), ii)? What new pressures are being imposed on national statistical/census offices by governments interested in using census data for non-statistical purposes such as planning elections and other nation-building activities, addressing demands for individual-level data for the purpose of preparing population registers or voter registers (E/2004/24, chap. II. B, para. 2 (b), VI)? How best can national statistical/census offices respond to such demands? To what extent can census data provide the required information for large intergovernmental initiatives such as the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, or the United Nations Literacy Decade (E/2004/24, chap. II? B, para. 2 (b), VI)? Given the high costs of census operations, what strategies can countries adopt to maximize the dissemination and use of census results to justify such high investments (E/2004/24, chap. II? B, para. 2 (b), viii)? How can the United Nations *Demographic Yearbook* system better contribute to ensuring the international exchange of census data (E/2004/24, chap. II? B, para. 2 (b), ix)?

4. Reviewing national experience and lessons learned in the use of information technology (IT): While it is widely acknowledged that IT can expedite census activities, minimize error, and improve the quality and dissemination of census results, if not properly used, IT can also derail certain census operations. What are the lessons learned from countries that have used IT in the past census round? How should countries successfully incorporate IT into various census activities?

### **Format of the Expert Group Meeting**

The *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Rev.1* will serve as a reference for the expert group meeting. The meeting will subsequently submit its recommendations and terms of reference to the 36<sup>th</sup> session of the Statistical Commission for consideration.

<sup>1</sup> Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2004, Supplement No. 4 (E/2004/24), chap. II. B, para. 2 (a).  
<sup>2</sup> *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Rev. 1* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.98.XVII.8 and corrigendum).



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## Appendix 3. Organization of Work

Wednesday, 15 September 2004—Conference room 5

**Registration of participants (8:30 - 9:30 a.m.)**

**Morning session (9:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.)**

**Opening**

**Introductory remarks**

**Purpose of the meeting**

### **1. Emerging issues and core topics**

As the 2000 census decade comes to an end, experts have raised the need to update selected sections of the current *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* as well as to supplement the publication by providing guidelines on emerging issues. Issues such as general mortality, including mortality due to HIV/AIDS and maternal mortality; human functioning and disability; ethnicity and indigenous peoples; and international and internal migration, among others have been raised. The presentations will provide suggestions on activities for updating the relevant sections of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 1* as well as a provisional list of core census topics for discussion and consideration. The *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 1* will serve as a primary reference document for the session.

**Presentations**

**Discussion and recommendations:**

- From a national and regional point of view, what are some of the main issues that emerged during the 2000 round of censuses for which improved statistics are needed?
- To what extent does the suggested list of core topics meet current data needs at the national and international levels?
- What changes are needed in the *Principles and Recommendations* to better address these emerging issues?
- What actions should the Expert Group take to ensure that the update includes these key issues?

### **Relevant Documentation:**

- Topics of emerging policy relevance and suggested core and essential census topics: Implications for updating the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* (UNSD) (ESA/STAT/AC.98/1).
- Considering issues relate to the collection of information of disability, maternal mortality and HIV/AIDS mortality in the census (World Health Organization) (ESA/STAT/AC.98/10)
- ILO data gathering from countries based on population census results (ESA/STAT/AC.98/12)
- Critical issues relevant to population and housing censuses in the ESCWA region (ESA/STAT/AC.98/15)
- Emerging issues and core topics, dissemination of census data, and use of technology in census field communication: Comments from Australia (ESA/STAT/AC.98/16)

### **Background Documentation:**

- Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 1 (1998)
- Suggestions of topics concerning ageing for inclusion into the 2010 round of censuses (United Nations Division for Social Policy and Development, DESA) (ESA/STAT/AC.98/6)

### **Lunch break (1:00 – 3:00 p.m.)**

### **Afternoon session (3:00 - 6:00 p.m.)**

## **2. Alternative approaches to traditional census taking**

Various alternative approaches to traditional census taking have gained popularity in recent years. The session will provide an overview of various approaches to census taking and present specific key features of each approach and their rationale. The meeting will deliberate on activities necessary to determine the extent to which the *Principles and Recommendations* should be modified or updated to take into account these new approaches.

### **Presentations**

#### **Discussion and recommendations:**

- What are the strengths or/and weaknesses of each of these designs vis-à-vis the traditional census approach which is characterized by individual enumeration, universality within a defined territory, simultaneity and defined periodicity?
- What are the technical properties of these designs?
- How portable is each of the above mentioned designs to countries under different conditions? Are there core requirements for a country to successfully adopt and implement the various designs?

- To what extent should the *Principles and Recommendations* consider intercensal survey programmes?
- What actions should the Expert Group take, if any, to ensure that the update of the *Principles and Recommendations* addresses alternative approaches?

**Relevant Documentation:**

- Alternative Census Designs: An Overview of Issues (ESA/STAT/AC.98/2)
- Statement from Peru (ESA/STAT/AC.98/5)
- The 2008 Israel Integrated Census of Population and Housing (ESA/STAT/AC.98/9)
- A proposal under study as part of the planning of the 2010 Mexican Population and Housing Census (ESA/STAT/AC.98/10)

Thursday, 16 September 2004—Conference room 3

**Morning session (9:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.)**

**3. Reviewing national experience and lessons learned in the use of information technology (IT)**

The use of technology is pervasive in many areas of human endeavour, census activities are no exception. There is a common perception among census practitioners that information technology (IT) would expedite various census activities and in some cases minimize error and improve the quality and dissemination of census results. There is however, a dark side of this story, if IT is not properly used, it can derail certain census activities. The session will review national experiences and lessons learned in the use of information technology in censuses. These will include, among others, global position systems (GPS) in census mapping, handheld devices in data collection, scanning technologies, warehousing and data mining; dissemination media; internet in data collection, entry and dissemination; geographical information systems (GIS) in census planning, data collection and dissemination. The meeting will make recommendations regarding the next steps to be taken by the Expert Group in assessing the use of IT in censuses. The recommendations of this session will be taken into consideration in the revision and updating of the *Principles and Recommendations*.

**Presentations**

**Discussion and recommendations:**

- What strategies can be adopted in the area of IT to improve timeliness and efficiency of census operations?
- What are the salient lessons learned from countries that have used IT in the last census round?
- How should the United Nations Statistics Division facilitate exchange of experiences between countries and promote best practices in the use of IT?

- To what extent should the *Principles and Recommendations* provide guidance on use of IT in censuses, given the dynamic innovations in this area? What other strategies and approaches might be explored?

**Relevant Documentation:**

- Integration of GPS, Digital Imagery and GIS with Census Mapping (ESA/STAT/AC.98/14)
- The Use of Hand Held Device in the Muscat Governorate (ESA/STAT/AC.98/7)
- Modern Means and Technology Used in the Oman Census Programme (ESA/STAT/AC.98/8)

**Lunch break (1:00 – 3:00 p.m.)**

**Afternoon session (3:00 - 6:00 p.m.)**

**4. Promotion, usage and dissemination of census results**

What is the use of conducting a census if the data are not disseminated successfully? The session will focus on the elements of a successful census data dissemination strategy as well as the competing needs for census data at the national, regional and international levels. The meeting will also provide an opportunity to deliberate on some of the challenges inherent in using census data for non-statistical purposes such as the production of voter’s registers and identification cards. In addition, the session will assess the role of the United Nations *Demographic Yearbook* system in the collection and dissemination of census data. The meeting will make recommendations on strategies to strengthen the promotion and dissemination of census results that will be submitted to the 36<sup>th</sup> Session of the Statistical Commission. These recommendations will also be taken into account in the drafting a handbook on dissemination of population census data in 2005/2006.

**Presentations**

**Discussion and recommendations:**

- What actions does the Expert Group recommend for promoting best practices in dissemination?
- How can the United Nations *Demographic Yearbook* system better contribute to ensuring the international exchange of census data?
- How can national strategies maximize access to information while ensuring the confidentiality of individual responses?
- The importance of historical preservation and archiving as well as data accessibility, considering national vested interests and international exchange will be considered.

**Relevant Documentation:**

- Non-statistical use of census enumeration (ESA/STAT/AC.98/3)
- Collection and dissemination of national census data through the United Nations *Demographic Yearbook* (ESA/STAT/AC.98/4)
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**Morning session (9:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.)**

**5. Delineation of priorities and terms of reference for the Expert Group, and discussion of the draft report**

Given the scope of the United Nations Statistics Division decennial census programme, the Statistical Commissions requested at its 35<sup>th</sup> Session that the Expert Group set clear priorities. What should these priorities be? At this meeting, the Expert Group will prepare draft terms of reference which will guide future work of the Expert Group in relation to the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme. The draft report of the Expert Group will also be discussed and final recommendations will be adopted for submission to the 36<sup>th</sup> Session of the Statistical Commission. The meeting will have before it the inputs provided by the Symposium on the draft resolution on the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme as well as the relevant sections of the report of the 35<sup>th</sup> Session of the Statistical Commission.

**Presentations**

**Lunch break (1:00 – 3:00 p.m.)**

**Afternoon session (3:00 - 6:00 p.m.)**

**5. Delineation of priorities and terms of reference for the Expert Group, and discussion of the draft report (cont.)**

**Conclusion**

**Approval of final recommendations**