

UNITED NATIONS SECRETARIAT
Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Statistics Division

10 July 2006
English only

2006 United Nations Expert Group Meeting on the
2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses
10-14 July 2006
United Nations, New York

Opening Statement

Paul Cheung, Director
United Nations Statistics Division

Dear colleagues,

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome you to New York and to this important Expert Group Meeting.

As you know, the World Programme on Population and Housing Census for the 2010 round has commenced in 2005 with the adoption of the resolution by the Statistical Commission. As in the past, a key task at the initial stage of the World Programme is to update the current Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Census which provide guidelines on the conduct of the census. It is important to note that the member states are fully aware of the importance of these principles and recommendations and have contributed much time and efforts to review them. This has made the job of UNSD which is the secretariat of the World Programme much easier. I would like to put on record our appreciation of those who have contributed in the global consultative process through meetings or on-line discussion groups, especially those who have taken on leadership roles. I would also like to put on record my appreciation of the Regional Commissions, especially the Economic Commission for Europe and the Economic and Social Commission for West Asia, for initiating regional consultation processes and developing regional recommendations. In addition, I would like to thank Statistics South Africa for organizing the African Forum in January this year to discuss the inputs from the African region. I also want to recognize Brazil, Fiji, Mexico, Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Cameroon for organizing regional meetings to discuss census approaches and methods.

We are now nearing the end of the review and update process. This revision is before you. It is based on the recommendations of two earlier expert group meetings held here in New York, a number of regional meetings and extensive exchange of comments and suggestions from over one hundred colleagues as members of three working groups and their subgroups. Your recommendations will be discussed and approved by the Statistical Commission in its 2007 session.

Moving to the draft text itself, I would like to highlight four important issues that have emerged in the global consultation process. First, I think there is clear and universal appreciation that

population and housing censuses should be defined by their outputs, and not by their choice of methods. Outputs must be detailed and available for small area domains. This has become extremely important in some countries where policy formulation requires comprehensive as well as frequent updating of local areas statistics. A key innovation of the draft recommendations for the 2010 round of censuses is the introduction of a list of recommended census tabulations that are being proposed for countries to produce at least once during the census decade. In the context of the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses, this is of paramount importance as one of its mandates underscores the need to ensure regional and international comparability of census data. I hope you will review this set of recommended tabulations and give your endorsement.

The second issue is on the choice of methods. For many countries, the traditional methods of census taking will continue to be adopted. This has become abundantly clear in our survey of their implementation and financing plans. However, countries are aware that there are new approaches to censuses and indeed regional meetings have been held to discuss them. Many countries would be interested to learn how these new approaches match the four essential features of a census as defined in this draft text, namely, (a) individual enumeration, (b) simultaneity, (c) universality, and (d) periodicity. If we are prepared to argue that a population census should indeed be defined by these four defining characteristics, then, we should be prepared to apply this yardstick on all new and old methods and give countries a clear and unambiguous assessment. It should be made very clear that there are no good or bad methods. All methods are products of careful national considerations and extensive consultation. However, in arriving at the methods of choice, countries should be guided by the international recommendation of the four defining characteristics of a population census. Again, I hope this expert group meeting would be able to take leadership on this issue and make the appropriate recommendation to the Statistical Commission.

The third issue concerns basic concepts. If regional and international comparability is to be achieved, there is a clear need to harmonize different national definitions of basic concepts. And the place of usual residence is the foremost among them as it defines the total population of a country or a region. The way the place of usual residence is defined has primary importance in

assessing internal and international migration. Introducing a time dimension in the definition and its adoption across the board would help to measure the stock and flows of people across borders in a more consistent manner. It also has a strong impact on the distinctions between *de jure* and *de facto* population counts. It is important for this group to give guidance on the harmonization of the basic concepts.

Finally, when it comes to field work and dissemination of data, another emerging issue as we move along the 2010 World Programme is the assignment of geographical coordinates to physical structures, also known as geo-coding. These fast-developing procedures are addressed in the current draft in a general way, when it elaborates on mapping and use of Geographical Information System. I think in more in-depth guidance should be given in due course. UNSD will assist in this process by collecting and disseminating best practices and by developing hands-on handbooks to provide more comprehensive elaboration and assessment.

I mentioned before that we are at the end of a fruitful consultation process. I hope the outcome of this process is a useful document with international ownership and applicability and that it will lead to greater availability of comparable data from the 2010 round of censuses.

I would like to conclude by thanking you for participating in this important international endeavor. As we move forward the activities of the World Programme, I hope I can count on your continued assistance in the years to come. Thank you.