STATISTICAL COMMISSION
Sixth session
Item 14 of the provisional agenda

CRIMINAL STATISTICS

(Memorandum prepared by the Secretary-General)

1. At its fifth session the Statistical Commission, considering the action taken by the Social Commission for the purpose of promoting greater uniformity in crime statistics, recommended that the Secretary-General proceed with the task of drafting a basic classification of crime and minimum standards for the compilation and presentation of criminal statistics (E/1696/Rev.1, paragraph 99).

2. As requested by the Economic and Social Council (resolution 243.F (IX)), the Secretary-General convened in 1950 an International Group of Experts on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders to whom was submitted, inter alia, the question of criminal statistics. At its second session, in Lake Success, 11-15 December 1950, the Group of Experts adopted, with regard to this subject, the recommendation attached hereto (Annex I: Excerpt from document E/CN.5/231).

3. The report of the International Group of Experts was submitted to the Social Commission, at its seventh session, together with the recommendations of the Secretary-General (E/CN.5/233). On the basis of this documentation, the Social Commission adopted a resolution concerning further action of the United Nations in the field of criminal statistics. This resolution is herewith forwarded to the Statistical Commission for its information and further action (Annex II).

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ANNEX I


II. CRIMINAL STATISTICS

A. Collection and publication of criminal statistics by the United Nations

17. With regard to the criminal statistics which might appropriately be collected, the Group gave consideration to three kinds of data:

(1) Statistics which can be used to measure the incidence and the trend of criminality in a given jurisdiction,
(2) Statistics which would give the number and types of offenders dealt with by the judicial authorities, and
(3) Statistics on the types of treatment or punishments employed by different countries.

These various statistics are essential for an understanding of the problem of criminality in its wider sense.

18. There is general agreement among experts that in order to measure criminality it is best to secure data at that stage in the procedure at which an offence becomes known to the investigating authorities. In some countries, the police would constitute these authorities; in other countries the examining magistrates. It is also generally accepted that data of this kind can be used for inter-temporal and inter-regional comparisons only in the case of relatively few offences. In the light of the above considerations the Group therefore recommended that data on offences committed be collected first of all for only three classes of offences: criminal homicide, aggravated assault, thefts with violence (robbery or burglary). Definitions and sub-divisions of these classes should be determined after further study of the problem by the United Nations.

19. With reference to data concerning offenders, it was recommended that certain essential information be collected and published respecting convicted persons. Taking into consideration the practical difficulties involved in the publication of such information from a large number of countries, the personal data should be restricted to sex and age. With regard to the classification of age, only two classes should be used at first, indicating the proportions of adults and non-adults among convicted persons.

/20. The Group
20. The Group also recommended that data be collected and published on the disposition of convicted offenders showing the different types of treatment or punishment imposed by the courts: capital and corporal punishments, fines, deprivation of liberty, suspended sentences including probation and a special category for miscellaneous dispositions.

B. Preparation of a Standard Classification of Offences

21. The standard classification of offences, on the basis of which data on convicted offenders and their treatment or punishment should be secured, should contain not more than fifteen classes so designed as to portray, as clearly as possible, the distribution of the most serious, as well as the most common, forms of criminal conduct. It was understood that forms of conduct which in some countries may be dealt with by administrative bodies rather than by courts (vagrancy, etc.) should be included.


22. It was also understood that the preliminary draft of such a standard classification would be made by a consultant engaged for that purpose.

23. It was recommended that for the purpose of instituting such a system of collection and publication of international criminal statistics, a survey be made by the United Nations of a representative number of existing national reports on criminal statistics in order to determine their structure and content.

24. It was further recommended that in view of the fact that many countries now lacked systems of criminal statistics, or now publish criminal statistics which could be greatly improved if technical advice and assistance were available to them, the United Nations Secretariat, on the basis of the survey previously mentioned and the advice of a consultant or consultants, prepare a manual or handbook which would suggest minimum standards for the collection, analysis and presentation of criminal statistics at different stages of the procedure involved in dealing with offences and offenders.

25. It was finally recommended that whenever the United Nations is prepared to render technical assistance in the establishment or development of criminal statistics, such assistance should be given through whatever means it may have at its disposal (consultants, fellowships, seminars, etc.).
ANNEX II

(Draft resolution on Criminal Statistics adopted by the Social Commission at its seventh session, document E/CN.5/L.152)

"The Social Commission

Noting the "Statistical report on the State of Crime, 1937-1946" (E/CN.5/204), which was prepared by the Secretariat; the Report of the International Group of Experts which met in December 1950 (E/CN.5/231), and the Report of the Secretary-General on Criminal Statistics (E/CN.5/233);

Concurs in the analysis made by the International Group of Experts which points out that there are three major aspects of this problem:

A. Survey of National Criminal Statistics and the preparation of a manual;
B. Standard classification of offences;
C. Criminal statistics to be published by the United Nations.

Agrees that the formulation of a standard classification of offences and the standardization of criminal statistics is a task for experts and that such a task will inevitably occupy considerable time.

Recommends that the Economic and Social Council adopt the following resolution:

THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Noting the discussions at the seventh session of the Social Commission, regarding the subject of criminal statistics,

Requests the Secretary-General, with the assistance of available expert advice,

A. As a first step, to undertake a survey and analysis of national statistics on crime with a view to the preparation of a manual which would suggest minimum standards for the collection, analysis and presentation of criminal statistics, to assist governments in the improvement of their national statistics. Such a survey should concentrate on three kinds of data:
1. statistics which can be used to measure the incidence and the trend of criminality in a given jurisdiction;
2. statistics which would give the number and type of offenders dealt with by the judicial authorities, and
3. statistics on the types of treatment or punishments employed by different countries.

/B. To explore
B. To explore the possibility of achieving an agreed definition of the three following offences, in order to determine the practicability of an ultimate compilation of comparable international criminal statistics:
1. criminal homicide
2. aggravated assault
3. thefts with violence

C. Requests that the Statistical Commission assist in the discharge of these tasks on a continuing basis and Further requests the Secretary-General to make available periodically to the Statistical Commission and the Social Commission a progress report on this study."