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Session 1 -Invited paper

**UNITED NATIONS 2010 WORLD PROGRAMME ON
POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUSES AND RELATED SURVEYS:
A PROPOSAL FOR ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT OF MEMBER STATES**

Submitted by United Nations Statistics Division, DESA*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The United Nations Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs is initiating the *2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses*, to be implemented from 2005-2014. The goal of the *World Programme* is for all countries and areas to agree on a set of accepted international principles and recommendations governing the conduct of censuses; to conduct a census during the period 2005-2014; and to disseminate census results in a timely manner (See ESA/STAT/AC.97/1). In order to succeed, the *World Programme* requires the active support of Member States in a working partnership with the United Nations, its Regional Commissions and other intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations.
2. Member States are invited to become involved and support the *2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses* by:

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- a. Working in partnership with each other, in cooperation with the United Nations including its Regional Commissions and other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, to implement a successful national population and housing census. As partners, they will both provide and receive scientific and technical expertise and information, and reach agreement on ways to further harmonize and strengthen census results;
 - b. Identifying technical expertise and other resources to be shared by Member States in the conduct of their census. This may result, for example, in the sharing of IT expertise; the short-term exchange of professionals; sharing of training programmes; and the exchange of census information and data exchange, through a coordinated programme of partnership activities;
 - c. Pledging financial contributions to the Population and Housing Census Trust Fund by Member States and by other relevant intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations. The Trust Fund would be used to bridge the distances between national statistical offices in their exchange of resources and support, by providing the funds needed for travel, consultation, fellowships and advisory work, as well as for research and development of standards and methods necessary for the successful implementation of the *World Programme*;
 - d. Indicating their support for the *World Programme* before the United Nations Statistical Commission at its upcoming 36th session in March 2005. This includes agreeing to: a set of accepted international principles and recommendations governing the conduct of censuses; conducting a census during the period 2005-2014; and disseminating census results in a timely manner.
3. Interested governments or persons are invited to comment on this proposal by contacting the United Nations Statistics Division through the following email address: globalcensus2010@un.org, or by writing to the Director, United Nations Statistics Division, United Nations New York 10017; Fax (1) 212 963 1940; Telephone (1) 212 963 2563.

I. IMPORTANCE OF POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUSES

4. A population and housing census is one of the most important statistical activities undertaken by government. Census information is needed by governments for a broad variety of purposes, such as planning for schools, roads and hospitals, and essential development programmes. The census takes stock of the human resources of countries – their most important asset. It describes people according to their education, literacy, and employment status and living conditions. It points out their need for education, health, housing and transportation services. Government decisions about where to place health care centers, schools, transportation service such as buses, where to build new roads, are based on population and housing counts.

5. An important feature of a census is its comprehensive coverage. The census attempts to count each person in the population. As a result, censuses are costly and complex exercises. Most censuses are planned over a period of 3-5 years, prior to the enumeration. Afghanistan, for example, expects to employ more than 20,000 enumerators to conduct the census. In China, more than 6 million enumerators were employed in the last census. This is a complex task, and requires full awareness and agreement of the public to participate in such a gigantic event. Constructing detailed maps, and locating all the villages, dwellings and households are an important part of this activity.

6. A census is based on public trust. To gain public trust, official statistics must respect certain principles. There must be public access to the information collected. The information collected must not reveal individual persons and their characteristics. Information is compiled and made available impartially. Official statistics must honor citizen's entitlement to public information and use scientific principles and professional ethics on procedures. Information collected on individuals and their households is strictly confidential. It is used only for statistical purposes. Laws and regulations under which statistical offices operate are to be made public.ⁱ When these principles are violated they result in lack of trust and public cooperation. This reduces the validity and reliability of the information.

7. It is both efficient and effective to integrate the basic national survey needs of a country with census planning. Both surveys and censuses are linked at the national and international level by requirements for common definitions, concepts, classifications, and tabulation programmes so that they may together, fully meet programme and policy requirements for standardized and comparable information.

8. International agreement on standards and methods support cross-comparisons of census results. New and more complex approaches to census implementation and survey planning abound. In a number of countries, the long forms of censuses are being replaced with surveys that are conducted separately, but linked to the census, during the intercensal period. In other cases, surveys and various sets of national administrative records have been linked to obtain data that have traditionally been collected in a population census. In any case, the linking of information from these complex data sets requires common concepts and definitions and tabulation plans to be implemented.

II. IMPORTANCE OF NATIONAL SURVEYS AND ADMINISTRATIVE REGISTERS TO CENSUS PROGRAMMES

9. The United Nations Statistical Commission, in its deliberations, has considered three broad statistical activities as inter-related and essential for the study of population and housing, namely, (1) those of population and housing censuses; (2) household surveys; and (3) administrative registers. In recent years, register-based censuses are becoming population censuses in countries where administrative data are readily available. Community surveys, a form of household surveys, are also being used innovatively as important complements to traditional censuses.

10. The United Nations Statistics Division is working on ways to harmonize the statistics derived from these three critical activities. In this process, it will seek agreement among census and survey statisticians from national and international statistical offices on common standards and methods. An international expert group will be formed to focus on critical issues related to planning the next decade round of population and housing censuses (2005-2014).ⁱⁱ In particular, it will work on a strategy to evaluate alternative approaches to censuses, such as community surveys; population registers; and rolling censuses, for their effectiveness and efficiency under different national conditions (E/CN.3/2004/33, Para 2.).

III. ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE WORLD PROGRAMME OF POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUSESⁱⁱⁱ

11. For over six decades, the United Nations Statistical Commission and UN Regional Statistical Committees have played a key role in supporting national census taking. The UN

Statistical Commission established the *1950 and the 1960 World Population Census Programme* that was followed by the *1970, 1980 and 1990 World Population and Housing Census Programme*. These initiatives by the Statistical Commission were then followed by the initiation in 1994 of a *2000 World Programme of Population and Housing Censuses* in support of census-taking worldwide. These most recent actions taken by the Commission resulted in a resolution by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in support of the *2000 World Population and Housing Census Programme* (Resolution 1995/7).

12. The resolution of ECOSOC for the 2000 round of censuses urged Member States to: (1) Carry out population and housing censuses during the period 1995-2004, taking into account international and regional recommendations relating to population and housing censuses and giving particular attention to advance planning and timely dissemination of census results to all users; and (2) to provide census results to the United Nations and other appropriate intergovernmental organizations to assist in studies on population, environment and socio-economic development issues and programmes. The resolution also urged the United Nations Secretary General to proceed with the development of the *2000 World Population and Housing Census Programme* and to make the necessary preparations with a view to assisting countries in its successful implementation.

13. Under the various mandates of the 1950-2000 *World Programmes*, the United Nations Statistics Division as Secretariat to the Statistical Commission and in collaboration with the Regional Commissions of Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Western Asia, have played a key role in the coordination of *World Programmes*, in the preparation of principles and recommendations, the setting of standards and methods, in the dissemination of census results through the *United Nations Demographic Yearbook* database system, and in the provision of technical cooperation for census operations.

14. As part of the *World Programme*, standards and methods of census taking were prepared by the Statistics Division. The *United Nations Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 1*^{iv} provide agreed definitions, concepts, and harmonized procedures for census taking. A series of Handbooks were also prepared and will need updating based upon experiences of the previous decade (See Annex 1. for a list of currently existing census handbooks). It is important to note that the Statistical Commission at its 35th session, requested that these principles and recommendations, and related handbooks be reviewed and updated, in light of the experiences provided by the last decade round (1995-2004) and for planning the next decade round (2005-2014)^v.

15. The United Nations Regional Commissions participated actively in this process, in partnership with Member States, to ensure that the regional dimension be taken into account. The Economic Commission for Europe, in particular, in the past five decades prepared a regional version of census recommendations that is traditionally geared to the circumstances and needs of statistically advanced countries. The 2000 version of the ECE census recommendations^{vi} was endorsed by the Conference of European Statisticians in 1997 and was widely used in the 2000 round of censuses as reference by many countries in the ECE and in other regions.

16. International funding agencies such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and other international organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank, have supported the conducting of censuses through the provision of funds, loans, and technical assistance. Their help has been instrumental in the success of the *World Programmes*.

17. Technical cooperation activities by these agencies and organizations as well as cooperation activities provided by the Statistics Division and Regional Commissions include the conducting of international and regional training workshops, provision of fellowships for countries to visit, observe and learn from neighboring countries about the conducting of censuses, the provision of specialized technical advisory services to countries in the implementation of complex statistical procedures and methods, as well as training and advice in census planning and management, as needed. Activities are also initiated to assist in the evaluation of the census results, prior to their distribution worldwide.

18. Member States and their national statistical offices have similarly provided a wide range of resources for technical cooperation to national statistical authorities requesting assistance in the planning and conducting of population and housing censuses. The Regional Commissions are often instrumental in arranging such mutual assistance.

A. How many countries have conducted a census (1995-2004)?^{vii}

19. Of the 230 countries and areas of the world that report to the United Nations Demographic Yearbook, a total of 194 have conducted a population and housing census since 1995, or have conducted a population-register-based census. Censuses vary greatly in their total populations that they must cover: from fewer than 100 persons in small island areas, to more than 1.2 billion persons in countries such as China and India.

20. It is important to note that 89 percent of the world's population resides in a country that has conducted a census since 1995. This is an enormous achievement. Much, however, remains to be done; only 52 percent^{viii} of Africans reside in a country that has conducted a census in the Africa region, compared with 99 percent of Europeans, 95 percent of Asians^{ix}. Technical advisory services must work to assist countries in the completion of censuses not yet conducted, as well as to consider alternative and perhaps more effective ways to manage and complete these incomplete works.

21. There is an expected time lag between the conducting of censuses and the final dissemination of basic population information. Most countries would be able to provide census figures for the total population by sex, soon after the population census is conducted. Thus far, since 1995, a total of 194 countries have either conducted a census or have based their census figures on a population register-based census. Of these countries, 7 out of 10 have provided the United Nations with census information on at least their total population by sex. Far fewer have provided results on other important topics such as educational attainment, literacy and other characteristics.

B. The 2010 World Programme

22. The United Nations Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs is initiating the *2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses*, to be implemented from 2005-2014. The goal of the *World Programme* is for all countries and areas to agree on a set of accepted international principles and recommendations governing the conduct of censuses; to conduct a census during the period 2005-2014; and to disseminate census results in a timely manner. In order to succeed, The *World Programme* requires the active support of Member States in a working partnership with the United Nations, its Regional Commissions and other intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations.

23. The Statistical Commissions, at its 36th session in 2005, will consider a resolution in support of the *2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme* covering the census years 2005-2014. See Annex 2 for a summary of activities that would be covered by the *World Programme*.

24. The implementation of the *World Programme* will be facilitated by the establishment of a Trust Fund for Population and Housing Censuses coordinated by the United Nations Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The Trust Fund would be used to bridge the distances between national statistical offices in their exchange of resources and support, by providing the funds needed for travel, consultation, fellowships and advisory work, as well as for research and development of standards and methods necessary for the successful implementation of the *World Programme*. The proposal for a Trust Fund has also been noted and supported by the recently held International Round Table on Managing for Development Results as part of the Marrakech Action Plan (2-5 March 2004).^x

25. The role of Member States in the setting of standards; data collection and dissemination; and in the provision of technical advisory services, is crucial. The United Nations Statistics Division stands ready to provide Secretariat support to this initiative of active involvement of Member States, under the auspices of the Statistical Commission.

26. The regional dimension of the *World Programme* will be ensured by the coordination with the activities promoted in the area of population and housing censuses by the United Nations Regional Commissions. In particular, the *World Programme* will include the activities currently being carried out by the ECE, in partnership with Member States, to develop the 2010 revision of the Recommendations for the Population and Housing Censuses in the ECE Region.

IV. ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT OF MEMBER STATES IN SUPPORT OF THE 2010 WORLD PROGRAMME OF POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUSES AND RELATED SURVEYS

27. Member States are invited to participate in the *World Programme* and to support the conduct of censuses around the world. This could be done through the supply and exchange of expertise and information and other resources required. Member States' involvement and support of the *World Programme* is needed early in the upcoming decade, owing to the number of incoming requests by countries for immediate advice on alternative census designs that may be tried for the purpose of increasing effectiveness and efficiency in the gathering of population and housing information, as well as for reducing costs and shortening the time between data collection and dissemination.

28. It is important that there be a coordinated exchange of technical expertise and scientific research among countries early on in the upcoming decade, so that newly agreed standards and methods approved by the Statistical Commission and the Conference of European Statisticians are properly supported by technical services to countries in their implementation and use.

29. It is also essential to address the needs of countries in especially difficult circumstances that have either failed to conduct their censuses in the last decade, or have conducted them but have not fully tabulated and disseminated the data; one subcomponent of the larger *World Programme* and the working partnership would be focused on this specific issue. In this respect the Regional Commissions can play an important role, for instance through the promotion of specific initiatives at the sub-regional or national level.

30. A coordinated plan of work would need to be carried out under the auspices of the Statistical Commission. The United Nations Statistics Division, as Secretariat to the Commission, in cooperation with Regional Commissions, would coordinate activities of Member States leading to the increased exchange of ideas, equipment, advice, technical support, professional expertise and other required resources necessary for the completion of national population and housing censuses. Coordinated activities would lead to an increased sharing of IT expertise; the short-term exchange of professionals such as sampling specialists, geographic information specialists, specialists in using administrative data in statistics, and other experts needed to resolve immediate problems that Member States confront in the planning and conducting of censuses; sharing of training programmes and training materials for improvement of concepts, definitions, questionnaires, classifications, coding practices and the like; it may also result in the sharing of census information, data reviews and data exchange through a coordinated programme of work. As partners, they will both provide and receive scientific and technical expertise and information and reach agreement on ways to further harmonize and utilize census results.

31. This Proposal invites Member States' involvement and support of the *2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses* by:

- a. Working in partnership with each other, in cooperation with the United Nations, its Regional Commissions and other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, to implement a successful national population and housing census. As partners, they will both provide and receive scientific and technical expertise and information, and reach agreement on ways to further harmonize and strengthen census results;
- b. Identifying technical expertise and other resources to be shared by Member States in the conduct of their census. This may result, for example, in the sharing of IT expertise; the short-term exchange of professionals; sharing of training programmes; and the exchange of census information and data exchange, through a coordinated programme of partnership activities;
- c. Pledging financial contributions to the Population and Housing Census Trust Fund by Member States and by other relevant intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations. The Trust Fund would be used to bridge the distances between national statistical offices in their exchange of resources and support, by providing the funds needed for travel, consultation, fellowships and advisory work, as well as for research and development of standards and methods necessary for the successful implementation of the *World Programme*;
- d. Indicating their support for the *World Programme* before the United Nations Statistical Commission at its upcoming 36th session in March 2005. This includes agreeing to: a set of accepted international principles and recommendations governing the conduct of censuses; conducting a census during the period 2005-2014; and disseminating census results in a timely manner.

32. The United Nations Statistics Division, as Secretariat to the Statistical Commission, stands ready to assist in implementing this proposal for active involvement of Member States.

End notes

ⁱ *The Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics* adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission, in its Special Session of 11-15 April 1994.

ⁱⁱ Economic and Social Council, Official Records 2004, Supplement No. 4, *United Nations Statistical Commission Report on the thirty-fifth session (2-5 March 2004)* (E/CN.3/2004/33, para2).

ⁱⁱⁱ Web site: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/sources/census/census1.aspx>

^{iv} United Nations publication (ST/ESA/STAT/SER.M/67/Rev.1).

^v E/2004/24, para.2.

^{vi} Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), *Recommendations for the 2000 Censuses of Population and Housing in the ECE Region*, Statistical Standards and Studies, No. 49
<http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2000.00census.htm>

^{vii} Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division, *Population and Housing Census Dates Website*: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/census/cendate/index.htm>, as of 27 July 2004.

^{viii} Countries that have not conducted a census since 1995 in Africa include: Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Madagascar, Morocco, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Togo and Western Sahara. Some of these countries plan to conduct their census by 2004, such as Morocco and Sierra Leone.

^{ix} Countries in Asia that have not conducted a census since 1995 include Afghanistan, Bhutan, Jordan, Demographic People's Republic of Korea, Lebanon, Myanmar, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, Uzbekistan, and Yemen. Again, some countries plan to conduct a census by 2004, such as Jordan, Oman and Saudi Arabia.

^x See Background Document to the Statistical Commission, 35th session, 2-5 March 2005 for Item 6 of the provisional agenda, "The Marrakech Action Plan for Improving Development Studies" Action 2, Para's. 24-27. A paper presented to the Second International Roundtable on Managing for Development Results, Marrakech, Morocco 4-5 February 2004, sponsored by the Multilateral Development Banks (African Development Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Inter-American Development Bank and World Bank) in collaboration with the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD.
