



UNITED NATIONS  
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS  
STATISTICS DIVISION

**Meeting on building a strong national statistical systems in Africa:  
the key role of the 2010 World Programme on Population Censuses  
Capetown, 30 January – 2 February 2006**

### **Opening Statement**

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Dear colleagues,

I am delighted to have this opportunity to address such a distinguished gathering of chief statisticians and census experts from all African countries. It is a great pleasure to be part of this important event and witness the presence and commitment of such a large group of statisticians and experts from the region.

Statistics have moved up in the development agenda and governments increasingly recognize the importance of evidence based policy making and monitoring. In addition, resulting from the monitoring requirements for the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and the UN Development Agenda, there has been an increased awareness of the importance and urgency of building statistical capacity in less developed countries, to ensure the measurability of progress towards these goals and to inform the necessary policies and plans to achieve them.

An effective statistical system that can meet key requirements for results-based management and all other data needs for the country, must include: an effective and well-run national statistical service, based on an appropriate legal and institutional framework, sufficient financial and human resources, and a functioning IT infrastructure; and a regular programme of data collection and analysis, including population censuses, integrated household survey programmes, civil registration systems and compilation of economic statistics.

Statistical systems and laws in Africa are currently still not fully developed and implemented. In many countries, where several line ministries and private institutions collect data through administrative reporting systems and small scale surveys, statistical coordination at national level is still limited. Where there have been attempts to improve coordination among the main data producers and data users, these have not been sustained over a sufficiently long period. There is a need to reinforce and promote awareness of the importance of reliable and timely statistical data for formulating evidence-based national policies and ensure a continuous political commitment for the development of sound statistical systems.

Population censuses are the major source of bench mark data in Africa providing statistical information on demographic, social and housing characteristics that is critical for the creation of a system of reliable and timely socio-economic data. The World

Programme on Population and Housing Census has a long history--starting almost fifty years ago, in 1958--and its long standing contribution to the global statistical infrastructure is well known. The recent Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics (MAPS), adopted by the Second International Roundtable on Managing for Development Results in 2004 and endorsed by the UN Statistical Commission in 2005, recommends mainstreaming strategic planning of statistical systems to ensure that all countries possess the basic statistical infrastructure and data collection programmes and includes in particular the regular undertaking of a population and housing census.

Last year we launched the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses. The United Nations Economic and Social Council, at its substantive session of 2005, adopted a resolution (2005/13) that emphasises the three main goals of the Programme: conducting at least one population and housing census in every country or area in the period 2005-2014; producing an updated version of United Nations Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses; and providing a platform for comprehensive exchange of experiences, countries' participation, technical assistance, information and data dissemination.

As you know, the United Nations Statistics Division coordinates work to set internationally agreed standards and methods in its role as Secretariat of the Statistical Commission and in coordinating other inter-agency and inter-governmental bodies. It has over the years produced, in consultation with country experts and national statisticians, guidelines and principles to conduct population censuses and has assisted countries through technical advisory services and ad hoc country projects to conduct population censuses. For this round of censuses, the United Nations Statistics Division, as the secretariat of the 2010 World Programme, is committed to ensure its implementation. Our efforts are backed by national statistical offices and international bodies, such as the World Bank and UNFPA. Based on the experiences of the 2000 round of censuses, especially the positive outcomes of regional synergetic processes that benefited all the countries involved, we are now placing special emphasis on the regional and sub-regional cooperation. To this end, a strategy is being developed whereby regional and sub-regional organizations are encouraged and supported to plan cooperative census activities.

Advocating for population and housing censuses is invariably an area that needs special attention. This is especially true in this region of the world, where a considerable number of countries or areas did not conduct a population and/or housing census in the previous round of censuses. For example, the United Nations *Demographic Yearbook* indicates that 16 countries, home to 43% of total population of Africa did not conduct a census for the past ten years. Thus the importance of advocacy and in an attempt to motivate as many sponsors at national and international level as possible, we are working with other international agencies to raise the awareness at the international and national levels, of the need to conduct population and housing censuses.

This meeting is unprecedented in the region and represents a very important step in the work to build sustainable and effective statistical systems in every country of the region. It also clearly marks a shift towards a renewed and stronger intra-regional collaboration in the path to build a strong African statistical community. Also, this forum will provide a tremendous opportunity to discuss coordination of population census activities and data dissemination within the region to help ensure intraregional data comparability, and to review the principles and standards with a view towards your specific concerns and policy priorities.

I also would like to say that, while the spirit of census-taking remains unchanged, we are witnessing significant innovations in census technology and methodology. This critical re-examination is the key to progress as we modernize our statistical systems and processes. This is also especially important for countries in this region where the use of new technologies can help optimize use of human and financial resources, sometimes limited.

Finally, I am happy to report that since the Programme was launched last year, work on the revision of the *Principles and Recommendations* has progressed well. The Statistics Division formed working groups focusing on: (a) standards, framework and a core set of topics; (b) census planning and management; and (c) promotion of censuses. An interactive electronic forum was also established to facilitate the exchange of opinions, comments and suggestions and to.

Let me conclude by saying that I hope that the results of your deliberations will be conveyed to the next session of the UN Statistical Commission in March, where I will see

many of you again. I want to express again my appreciation for your commitment to this important work for a better national and global statistical system. I wish you a successful meeting.