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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

United Nations expert group meeting

**Methodologies and lessons learned to evaluate the completeness
and quality of vital statistics data from civil registration**

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Dear colleagues,
Distinguished experts,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I welcome all of you to this expert group meeting on methodologies, and lessons learned, for evaluating the completeness and quality of vital statistics data derived from a civil registration data system. The meeting has been organized by the Population Division[1] in collaboration with Statistics Korea (KOSTAT), thanks to generous funding support provided by the Government of the Republic of Korea through KOSTAT. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Government of the Republic of Korea, as well as our colleagues and partners in Statistics Korea.

Over the next two days, we will hear presentations and discussions on the methodologies used for evaluating the quality of vital statistics data as estimates of key demographic parameters, such as indicators of the level of fertility or mortality in a population. In this way, vital statistics data form a critical input for the evaluation of national demographic trends, as part of the UN's production every two years of detailed estimates and projections of the world's population. It is worth recalling that vital statistics, as estimates of demographic parameters, can be derived from various sources. This meeting is concerned with the specific situation in which vital statistics data are derived from a civil registration data system, with a focus on low- and middle-income countries.

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[1] Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations

This meeting is of interest in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals, adopted in 2015 by the UN's General Assembly, which include specific targets and indicators reflecting the aspiration of the UN's Member States for further improvements in the registration of vital events throughout the world. It bears mentioning that the importance of a well-functioning civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) system is reflected explicitly at two locations within the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals.

First, Goal 16 on peaceful and inclusive societies recognizes the importance of civil registration as a source of legal identity. Without legal identity, a person is not fully a person, lacking access to large sectors of the formal economy and to many public services as well. Target 16.9 indicates that by 2030 legal identity should be provided to all persons. It gives specific mention to birth registration, which is widely recognized as a critical mechanism for providing legal identity.

Throughout the world, registering a child at birth is the first step in securing recognition before the law and safeguarding the person's human rights and access to justice. Despite recent progress, the births of more than one in four children under the age of 5 worldwide have not been recorded. In sub-Saharan Africa, more than half (54 per cent) of children under 5 years of age have not been registered. Globally, children living in urban areas are roughly 50 per cent more likely to be registered than their rural counterparts. In most regions, the prevalence of birth registration tends to be highest among the richest 20 per cent of the population.[2]

Second, Goal 17 on the means of implementing the entire package of Goals includes target 17.19 on capacity-building in developing countries to support national development plans. In that context, indicator 17.19.2 includes, as one of its two elements, the proportion of countries that have achieved 100 per cent completeness in the registration of births and 80 per cent completeness in the registration of deaths. The World Health Organization reported that 72 per cent of all births worldwide were registered in 2015, compared to roughly one third of all deaths.

While many developing countries still rely primarily on surveys and censuses to estimate the key demographic indicators, a number of lower- and middle-income countries have now achieved levels of coverage and completeness that make it possible to use vital statistics derived from civil registration rather than household surveys to estimate the essential demographic indicators.

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[2] United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals Report 2016

The purpose of this meeting is to:

1. Examine the status of vital statistics derived using information from a civil registration system, with an emphasis on low- and middle-income countries;
2. Review the state of knowledge about analytical methods for evaluating the proportion of vital events that are registered by a civil registration system and the quality of vital statistics data derived from civil registration; and
3. Review lessons learned from local and international experiences of applying these methods in various settings.

As part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the overall plan that contains the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals, the UN Member States have pledged that "no one will be left behind", which is a defining feature of the new development agenda. In that context, methods for evaluating the quality of civil registration and vital statistics data should offer the possibility of making such assessments not only at the national level but also at regional and local levels. Moreover, we will need methods for evaluating the quality of such information disaggregated along various dimensions, potentially including income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, and disability.

A number of methods have been developed or recently improved for assessing the completeness and quality of vital statistics information derived from civil registration. During the meeting, we will address the following questions:

- What are the methodologies available for evaluating the quality and completeness of the information collected by a civil registration system?
- What are the strengths and limitations of the various methods?
- What are the lessons learned from recent experiences with the application of these methods in different settings?
- What recommendations can be provided to lower- and middle-income countries on the best methods for evaluating the quality of their vital statistics data at the national, regional and local levels?
- What methodological research would be desirable in the future to address any pending needs?

The meeting will consider methods for evaluating the quality of vital statistics data not only at the national level but also at regional and local levels, as the quality and coverage of vital registration often varies within countries. We will also review recent progress and experiences

both in OECD countries and in lower- and middle-income countries focusing on the use of validation studies that use record linkage to assess the completeness and quality of birth and death records from civil registration.

Over the next two days, I look forward to the presentations and fruitful discussions. Our hope is that the interactions in the meeting will both inspire and enable you to provide useful conclusions and recommendations on the topics at hand. More specifically, by the end of these two days, I hope that you will, as a group, have reached some concise conclusions with regard to practical advice and recommendations on best practices that can help to inform future work on a set of operational guidelines for evaluating the quality of vital statistics data and the associated civil registration system.

In that context, before concluding, I would like to take a moment to offer a special word of thanks to our colleagues from the Statistics Division — one of our sister divisions within the UN's Department of Economic and Social Affairs — for the close and productive collaboration between our two Divisions, which has been essential in driving forward the recent work on these topics at the United Nations.

Once again, I wish to welcome all of you to this gathering.