



international union for the scientific study of population v **IUSSP**

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Statement prepared for the Advocacy and Resource Mobilization International Meetingⁱ

directed toward the successful implementation of the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses in Developing Countries

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Since its founding in 1928, the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP) has had a keen interest in national statistical systems since data needed to measure basic demographic processes (births, deaths, migration) and population growth and distribution are based on national statistics. Indeed the IUSSP emerged out of efforts directed toward the improvement of international statistics on vital processes that started with John Graunt's scientific work in the second half of the seventeenth century.¹ Interest in births and deaths was stimulated in the 1800s as the need grew for data that could be used on an actuarial basis to assess risk for insurance systems and as social concerns spread about hygienic conditions in large urban areas. As a result, governments started to make advances in census-taking and vital statistics in the 1800s that eventually led to more reliable data on demographic processes.

Work directed toward the development and improvement of national statistical systems was initially pushed by scholars and national governments but not coordinated at the international level. That changed in 1853 when the first intergovernmental statistical conference was held at Quetelet. The International Statistical Institute (ISI) was formed at that

¹ Frank Lorimer, "The Role of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population," Pp. 86-96 in *The Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly*, Vol. XLIX (4), October 1971, Part 2.

meeting and began to sponsor biennial non-governmental conferences at the international level in 1885.² While special sessions were held on demographic statistics at these international meetings, it was not until a 1927 conference organized by Margaret Sanger in Geneva that scholars interested in the substantive aspects of population trends got together internationally to exchange information and research findings. The scholars, however, wanted to distance themselves from the birth control movement with which Margaret Sanger was associated and decided against joining the international birth control organization which she tried to organize at the meeting. Scholars in attendance did take advantage of the 1927 conference to discuss formation of the IUSSP and to plan for the constituent international assembly of the IUSSP which was held in Paris the following year.³

During its early years, the IUSSP worked closely with the International Statistical Institute (ISI) and, because of the overlap in membership between these two organizations, often coordinated the timing of its international conference with ISI so that they would take place at the same time and place in order to reduce travel costs for members wishing to attend. Joint meetings of IUSSP and ISI were held in Washington, DC in 1951, India in 1953, Rome in 1953, Brazil in 1955, Stockholm in 1957, and Ottawa in 1963. Most of the founders of the IUSSP were well regarded international statisticians, including Corrado Gini (Italy), Kiyoo Sue Inui (Japan), H.B. Lindborg (Sweden), Soren Hansen (Sweden), Louis Dublin (USA), R. H. Coats (Canada), Paulo Souza (Brazil), Bernard Mallet (United Kingdom), and Adolphe Landry (France). In many developing countries today, particularly India, demography and statistics continue to be closely linked disciplines.

² *ibid*

³ The IUSSP in History: An Exhibit on the Foundation and Early Developments of the international Union for the Scientific Study of Population, prepared for the XXth IUSSP General Conference, Florence, 5-12 June 1985.

Collaboration between ISI and IUSSP began to diminish in the 1960s as measurement of fertility levels and rates started to be derived from sample survey data. Shifting directions in the measurement of population dynamics stemmed largely from growing international concern in the 1950s and 1960s over population growth levels in underdeveloped areas and the need for improved data that would document at some regularity levels and trends in human reproduction. Institutions such as the United Nations Population Division, the Population Council, the Milbank Memorial Fund and the IUSSP led efforts in the 1950s and 1960s to improve statistics on demographic processes and population growth in underdeveloped areas in order to document international population trends.

Although many statisticians and demographers argued that vital statistics and census systems within countries needed to be developed or improved because population-based data were required to compute birth and other vital rates for small areas and for sampling frames, resources within countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America proved to be insufficient to develop and maintain vital registration systems in the decades that followed. Census systems too were poorly developed or non-existent in many countries that became independent in the 1960s and 1970s and improvement in those systems was constrained by limited resources. By the 1980s, most demographic research on fertility and mortality in developing countries focused on demographic dimensions that could be readily estimated based on sample survey data, namely total fertility rates, reproduction rates, infant mortality, and maternal mortality. Although release of decennial census data regularly documented limitations of relying only on estimates of population growth based on surveys, the field continues to draw on specialized survey data to estimate demographic processes and population trends in the period between decennial censuses.

While survey programs carried out under the World Fertility Survey (WFS) and Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) have enriched international and comparative understanding of fertility levels and trends, data to measure other demographic processes -- internal and international migration, urbanization, and adult mortality, in particular -- continue to rely heavily on census or vital statistics data. In addition, census data are critical for population projections at local, national and international levels. As international interest in measuring the volume of international migration flows between countries grows, most understanding on that issue derives from census data. Census questions on place of residence one or five years ago, place of birth, and nationality are valuable raw data for scholars of migration. Unfortunately research on migration is hindered because many countries either do not include those questions in their censuses or do not make census data widely available in a usable format for researchers. Growing concerns in developed countries over privacy and confidentiality have also restricted data access in recent years and could lead to further limitations on use of census data for research purposes.

Since its foundings, the IUSSP has emphasized the need to improve knowledge of demographic processes and trends and advanced the argument that in order to do so, it is essential to have solid census, vital statistics, and survey data that would allow adequate measurement of these processes and trends. A ten-year IUSSP effort in the 1970s directed by Sidney Goldstein documented the status and limitations of available data on urbanization at the country-level and identified steps that needed to be taken to improve data and measurement of urbanization. The importance of census and housing statistics was emphasized throughout that report.

In the 2001 to 2002 period, the IUSSP renewed its work on urbanization by forming a Working Group on Urbanization chaired by Tony Champion. The group decided to focus its

efforts on the definition and measurement of urbanization and the adequacy of existing data on urbanization. Based upon discussions at a 2002 IUSSP Seminar organized by the IUSSP Working Group on Urbanization at Bellagio, Italy, it was concluded that the traditional approach to studying urbanization trends which is based on the urban-rural dichotomy, had lost much of its relevance owing to the major changes that have affected settlement patterns in recent decades.⁴ The expert participants attending that meeting concluded that place continues to be very important in studying demographic processes and recommended that alternative ways of classifying human settlement and analyzing differences between places be identified. To advance that agenda, census data will remain critical. Subsequent meetings of participants in the Working Group were held at the United Nations Statistical Division, the Population Association of America and other places to disseminate the findings widely. In mid-2005 the IUSSP Scientific Panel on Urbanization will extend upon the measurement advances made by the Working Group.

Today the IUSSP has almost 2000 members in 150 countries, including nearly all developing countries. Its members are employed by the producers as well as the users of census data. In 2005 the IUSSP will hold its XXVth International Population Conference from 18-23 July in Tours, France. The IUSSP plans to organize a 4-hour side meeting at the Conference that will focus on the 2010 round of censuses and bring together producers and users of census data to discuss how utilization of the 2010 round of population and housing censuses could be improved to meet the needs of demographers in the 21th century.

ⁱ Prepared by Mary M. Kritz, Department of Development Sociology, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York.

⁴ Tony Champion and Graeme Hugo, New Forms of Urbanization: Beyond the Urban-Rural Dichotomy, Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004.