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COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS OF THE POPULATION COMMISSION ON THE
"PRINCIPLES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A POPULATION CENSUS"

(Report by the Secretary-General)

1. At its recently completed thirteenth session, the Population Commission reviewed the draft of the Principles and Recommendations for a Population Census (presented to the Population Commission in document E/CN.9/200 and to the Statistical Commission in document E/CN.3/330). The Commission expressed its unanimous agreement with the basic contents of the draft and its great appreciation of the international and regional efforts which went into the preparation of the document. It considered the draft to be of great methodological value and practicality, especially as it made possible the solution of a number of problems connected with census taking and reduced the possible conflicts between national and international requirements.
2. Comments of individual representatives, embodying suggested changes in the draft, or calling attention to particular points, are set out below. The titles and paragraph numbers given as references are those of the annex of document E/CN.3/330.

Part I. Definition, value and essential features of a population census

Paragraph 7

3. The representative of France proposed that the definition of a census be expanded by adding a reference to biometric data, so that the first part of the sentence would read "A census of population is the total process of collecting, compiling, evaluating, analysing and publishing demographic, economic, social and

possibly biometric data ...". He was of the opinion that the time might come when census data on height and weight of persons, for example, could materially advance biometric studies and facilitate the study of the effects of economic development.

Paragraph 30

4. The representative of Panama was opposed to the use of a census for establishing a continuous population register, since it ran counter to the principle of census confidentiality. She also felt that it was impractical because many people referred to themselves by different names at different times and the name used for register purposes might be different from that used for census purposes.

Paragraphs 36-37

5. The representative of Panama felt that it was impractical to attempt to use information from the population census in connexion with a census of agriculture or a census of establishments because it was time consuming and not beneficial.

Paragraph 40

6. The representative of Panama expressed the opinion that the use of census data to check the accuracy of birth registration was impractical because of differences in names, date of birth and place of birth reported. Panama was one of the countries which had attempted such a check but had failed.

Part II. Planning, organization and administration of a population census

Paragraphs 86-87

7. The representative of France stressed the importance of census offices undertaking the popularization of the results of the census so that they could be used by persons who were not trained demographers, economists, etc.

8. The representative of Yugoslavia emphasized the importance of the promotion of studies and research on the basis of census results because the purpose of a census was not only to produce data but also to foster analysis.

Part V. Topics to be investigated in a population census

Paragraph 175

9. The representative of the United States and the representative of Panama suggested that "place of previous residence" should be included among the basic topics recommended. The representative of the United States stated that information on duration of residence did not become meaningful unless it was combined with information on the place of residence at the time of the census and on the previous place of residence. From that combined information, it was possible to draw conclusions regarding internal migration.

10. The representative of the USSR called for the inclusion, among the recommended topics, of "nationality" in the sense of ethnic origin. He felt the term "ethnic characteristics" which was used on the list of topics was not sufficient and that criteria used to identify ethnic groups, as set forth in paragraph 221 of the annex, did not provide for the identification of nationality. The representative of Yugoslavia supported these views, explaining that the word "nationality" in Russian and in his own language did not mean citizenship but "ethnic nationality". He proposed that the Secretariat should seek the most suitable term for the concept in the non-Slavonic languages.

11. The representative of Panama stated that the exact meaning of "ethnic characteristics" was not clear and that, in any event, it would be difficult for an enumerator to assess such characteristics. The topic was not of importance in Panama and could be deleted in favour of more useful topics.

Paragraphs 179-181

12. The representative of the United States drew attention to the usefulness of collecting data on the number of births during a brief period prior to the census, in addition to information on life-time births, in countries lacking adequate birth registration. Indications regarding fertility could be derived from a comparison of the two sets of data.

13. He felt that data secured by the probing questions on fertility mentioned in paragraph 181 of the draft were useful in themselves as they threw light on levels of mortality, in addition to their utility in securing accurate information on the number of children born alive, and that they could profitably be tabulated.

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Paragraphs 194-199

14. The representative of France expressed the opinion that the concept of economic activity, which had never been clearly defined with regard to agriculture, was also losing some of its clarity in the economically developed countries where it had been rather precise. This was particularly true in regard to the economic activity of marginal groups, such as old persons, young persons, sick persons and married women. Thus, retired persons often stated in censuses that they were inactive, since they were being remunerated for this inactivity, although in fact they did engage in an activity. Hence, census information on type of activity should be accompanied by a detailed warning of the gross errors that might be found in the data.

15. The representative of the USSR stated that the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance had abandoned the classification of the population as economically active or not economically active in favour of a classification into "working" and "non-working" population. The classification of the population on the basis of economic activity made it impossible to distinguish adequately such categories of persons as the unemployed and those with unearned incomes.

Paragraphs 223-234

16. The representative of the USSR expressed his disagreement with the definition of "household" set forth in these paragraphs and his belief that further discussion of the definition was needed. The family should be conceived of as an economic unit of society, consisting of persons bound together by kinship who live together and have a common budget. The household constituted all the persons forming a family. Persons not related to the head of the household, such as boarders or servants, could not form part of the same household since they were not part of the family.

17. The family nucleus described in these paragraphs highlighted only the biological relationship among families and converted the family from an economic to a biological unit of society. In fact, many families consisted of several married couples and these families would be artificially divided by the criteria in the draft.

18. The representative of Panama explained that in Latin America the household, as defined in the draft, was used as the unit of enumeration in the census. The determination of the family was then made on the basis of the information on relationship to the head of the household.

Paragraphs 249-251

19. The representative of the United States emphasized the importance of the recognition in the draft that some countries, particularly in Africa and the Antilles, would have to depart from, or make additions to, the marital status categories set forth in paragraph 249, because of the existence in these countries of widespread categories of unions which did not fall into the basic grouping in that paragraph.

Paragraph 274

20. The representative of Japan explained, for the information of the Commission, in its consideration of urban and rural, the concept of "densely inhabited district" used in the 1960 census of Japan. This concept made use of the census enumeration district and classified as a "densely inhabited district" any area within a city, town or village comprising a group of contiguous enumeration districts in which the population density per square kilometre was 4,000 inhabitants or more and the total population as of the date when the enumeration districts were established was over 5,000 persons.

21. The Japanese Bureau of Statistics had also decided to tabulate the 1965 census results by enumeration districts so that it might be possible to construct different types of urbanized, semi-urbanized and rural areas according to different definitions for different purposes.

Part VI. Recommended tabulations

Paragraph 285

22. The representative of Panama pointed out that if, in accordance with her previous suggestion, "ethnic characteristics" was deleted from the recommended topics, then Tabulation 25 should also be deleted.

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23. The representative of the United States stated that, with respect to the specific questions on fertility considered in paragraph 181 of the draft, supplementary information concerning child mortality could be obtained by tabulating separately, according to the mother's age, the information from questions (a) and (b) or (a) and (c), and the information on the remaining topic could then be obtained by subtraction. A comparison of the total number of children brought into the world and the number of children still living, for example, would provide more complete information on mortality than the number of deaths occurring during the past year. His delegation therefore attached special importance to such tabulations.
