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SUMMARY

THE POPULATION REGISTER AS AN AGENCY FOR
COLLECTING STATISTICAL DATA

Adolfo Gaete-Darbó, Expert, United Nations
Technical Assistance (UNTA)

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THE POPULATION REGISTER AS AN AGENCY FOR COLLECTING
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Summary

Doubts have been raised as to whether the "register method" is useful as a means of collecting statistical data, and alternative mechanisms to replace it have been sought. It is desirable to determine whether one method should replace the other or whether there are advantages in the simultaneous existence of both, for the importance of the problem of world population growth lends great urgency to all endeavours to perfect systems for collecting and processing the data from demographic statistics.

In order to show the need to perfect the region's population register, this document gives a brief review of their present situation, describes the functions of a modern population register, and notes its contributions to development.

Present shortcomings include: Limited budget; antiquated organic laws and complex procedures; poorly trained registrars; incomplete coverage of the population and territory; uncertainty about the reliability of the entries, and poor collaboration from the community.

According to international recommendations, population registers, as centralized and independent national agencies, should carry out two basic functions: legal and the other statistical. The first of these is influenced by the Law, which evolves only slowly, while the statistical aspect contributes to knowledge of the characteristics and trends of the population. Various agencies make use of the data from population registers, and the social interest of these records has now come to be greater than their intrinsic individual interest. Population registers should thus adopt an active attitude vis-à-vis the community.

The practice of registering vital statistics indicates the extent to which human beings have become integrated with life in society and the legal system. Population registers contribute to social order, which is the basis of development, but they also require

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the participation of the community to achieve full reliability of the entries in them.

Population registers make it possible to implement the right to a name and the right to a nationality. There is a firm link between population registers and the United Nations, and the latter should watch over their improvement so as to guarantee the material expression of these rights.

Vital statistics reflect social life, and should therefore show social changes as they occur.

The improvement of population registers contributes to the institutionalization of public administration, but it can be demonstrated that similar results may be achieved by obtaining demographic growth rates through surveys.

Surveys always have to be financed by the Treasury, but population registers can be financed by the Treasury or by the community.

The international agencies have formulated principles and recommendations for improving population registers and the whole system which produces vital statistics, but little progress has been achieved. This - as several specialists agree - is probably due to the fact that activities in the field have not been very effective. More specialists in population registers are required, and in particular there is a need for an integrated, continuing, Latin Americawide programme of aid to these services. The formulation and implementation of such a programme should be the responsibility of a special agency. The line of action followed could be similar to that adopted by CELADE for the improvement of demographic studies and systems of assembling and processing statistics. The creation of such an agency, a Latin American Population Register Centre, could be one of the activities in World Population Year and could be financed by the United Nations Fund for Population Activities.