

# Ministerial Declaration

## to “Get every one in the picture” in Asia and the Pacific<sup>\*</sup>

*We, the ministers and representatives of members and associate members of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific assembled at the Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, held in Bangkok, from 24 to 28 November 2014,*

*Reaffirming* the human right of everyone to be recognized everywhere as a person before the law, which is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,<sup>1</sup>

*Recalling* the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,<sup>2</sup> the Convention on the Rights of the Child,<sup>3</sup> the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families,<sup>4</sup> and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,<sup>5</sup> which stipulate that States Parties should register all children immediately after birth without discrimination, as invoked by resolutions adopted by the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, the most recent being General Assembly resolution 66/141 of 19 December 2011, and Human Rights Council resolution 22/7 of 21 March 2013,

*Also recalling* the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages,<sup>6</sup> which stipulates that States Parties should ensure that all marriages are registered in an appropriate official register by the competent authority,

*Further recalling* General Assembly resolution 68/261 of 29 January 2014, which endorsed the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, and General Assembly resolution 64/267 of 3 June 2010, which acknowledged that reliable and timely statistics and indicators measuring a country’s progress are an indispensable basis for informed policy decision-making and for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals at the national, regional and international levels, on the understanding that this extends to other internationally agreed development goals and to monitoring at the subnational level,

*Recalling* World Health Assembly resolution WHA67.14 of 24 May 2014, in which member States were urged, in the context of the development agenda beyond 2015, to recognize the importance of accountability by strengthening of civil registration and vital statistics and health information systems, which can be used for monitoring health equity by providing disaggregated data that do not reveal information about individuals,

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<sup>\*</sup> Adopted by the Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and Pacific on 28 November 2014 in Bangkok, Thailand.

<sup>1</sup> General Assembly resolution 217 A (III).

<sup>2</sup> See General Assembly resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1577, No. 27531.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 2220, No. 39481.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 2515, No. 44910.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 521, No. 7525.

*Also recalling* Commission resolutions 67/12 of 25 May 2011 and 69/15 of 1 May 2013, which recognize the importance of civil registration and vital statistics for measuring aid effectiveness and raising the visibility of and improving policy focus on the most vulnerable groups,

*Welcoming* World Health Assembly resolution WHA67.10 of 24 May 2014, endorsing “Every newborn: an action plan to end preventable deaths”, particularly the strategic objective that every newborn needs to be registered, and newborn and maternal deaths and stillbirths need to be counted,

*Also welcoming* the conclusion on civil registration of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees of 17 October 2013,<sup>7</sup> which noted the importance of civil registration and documentation for the protection of refugees and that the lack of civil registration and related documentation makes persons vulnerable to statelessness and associated protection risks,

*Recognizing* that civil registration is the continuous, permanent, compulsory, and universal recording of the occurrence and characteristics of vital events in people’s lives in accordance with the national law, including births, deaths, foetal deaths, marriages, divorces, adoptions, legitimations and recognitions,

*Also recognizing* that civil registration and vital statistics systems are, depending on national laws and administrative arrangements, typically the shared responsibility of multiple ministries and government agencies, such as the ministries of the interior, justice, home affairs and health, national statistics offices, and local and provincial governments,

*Affirming* that universal and responsive civil registration and vital statistics systems have a critical role in achieving inclusive, equitable and people-centred development, including the following:

- Providing documents and a permanent record for individuals to establish their legal identity, civil status and family relationships, and subsequently promoting social protection and inclusion by facilitating access to essential services, such as education and health care, among others;
- Enabling good governance and strengthened public administration through greater political participation and accountability, and facilitating public service delivery by providing a basis for national population databases, national identity programmes and e-governance;
- Providing vital statistics on the demographics and health of the population and other information that offer an evidence base for policymaking at local, provincial and national levels, including preventative and targeted interventions for addressing social, economic and health inequities, especially among hard-to-reach and marginalized populations;
- Assisting the implementation of universal health coverage and providing the most reliable data to monitor and address the causes of mortality, including providing an evidence base for measures to improve newborn, infant and maternal health;
- Promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls through the provision of documents to prove family relations and civil status, and the production of age-, sex- and geographically disaggregated statistics;
- Preventing and reducing the risk of statelessness, human trafficking, child and early marriage, child labour etc., as well as promoting durable solutions for refugees, including by documenting links to the country of origin;

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<sup>7</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Conclusion on civil registration*, No. 111 (LXIV) – 2013, EXCOM Conclusions, 17 October 2013.

- Offering information for humanitarian planning, disaster risk reduction and management, and aiding the response to disasters,

*Deeply concerned* that an estimated 135 million children under 5 years of age in the region have not had their birth registered and that millions of other vital events are not registered,<sup>8</sup>

*Alarmed* that the majority of countries in the region do not possess universal and responsive civil registration and vital statistics systems that meet relevant international standards and recommendations,<sup>9</sup>

*Convinced* that a comprehensive and integrated approach to improving civil registration and vital statistics, involving all relevant stakeholders and incorporating civil registration and vital statistics into relevant national development plans, is the most effective and sustainable way to develop and improve civil registration and vital statistics systems,

*Recognizing* the need to address disparities in the civil registration coverage of hard-to-reach and marginalized populations, including people living in rural, remote, isolated or border areas, minorities, indigenous people, migrants, non-citizens, asylum seekers, refugees, stateless people, and people without documentation,

*Also recognizing* the need for special attention to build national capacities related to death registration and determining causes of death, including medical certification of death and coding causes of death according to the International Classification of Diseases, verbal autopsy and training of health workers,

*Underscoring* that the functioning of civil registration and vital statistics systems should be guided by the United Nations' Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System<sup>10</sup> and production of vital statistics undertaken in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics,

*Emphasizing* that, when universal, civil registration is the best source of vital statistics, and that, while household surveys have considerable value, they cannot replicate the strengths of civil registration as a data source, namely universality in coverage, permanence, continuity, archiving of records and cost-effectiveness over time, and are thus not a long-term substitute for civil registration and vital statistics systems,

*Recognizing* the important role and added value of international, regional and subregional organizations and initiatives to support the development and improvement of civil registration and vital statistics in countries through advocacy, technical assistance, capacity-building, dissemination of information, research, innovation, and facilitation of the exchange of knowledge and best practices,<sup>11</sup>

*Also recognizing* that non-governmental organizations, civil society, professional associations, media and the private sector, including those involved in public-private partnerships, can also play a significant role in supporting the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics, in accordance with national priorities and strategies,

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<sup>8</sup> This figure is an estimate provided by the United Nations Children's Fund, *Every Child's Birth Right: Inequities and Trends in Birth Registration* (New York, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> According to self-assessments conducted by 47 (out of a total of 62) ESCAP members and associate members during the period between 2010 and 2013 using a rapid assessment tool developed by the University of Queensland and the World Health Organization, 36 possessed civil registration and vital statistics systems that were categorized as "dysfunctional", "weak" or "functional but inadequate".

<sup>10</sup> *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System: Revision 3* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.13.XVII.10). Available from <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/Demographic/standmeth/principles/M19Rev3en.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Such as the first International Identity Management Conference, held from 23 to 25 September 2014 in Seoul, which recognized that civil registration is a basis for civil identification of individuals and that an organic link between civil registration and identity management is critical.

*Believing* that monitoring and accountability, including the setting of national targets for elements of civil registration and vital statistics, can expedite the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems,

*Appreciating* the efforts already made by members and associate members to improve their civil registration and vital statistics systems,

*Also appreciating* the ongoing support provided by development partners as part of the regional initiative to improve civil registration and vital statistics in Asia and the Pacific, including recent efforts to strengthen financing for civil registration and vital statistics improvement activities at national, regional and global levels,

*Recognizing* the valuable role of subregional programmes to improve civil registration and vital statistics and in the implementation of the present Declaration, particularly for addressing unique subregional challenges,

*Acknowledging* that the establishment of a regional network of civil registrars would facilitate information sharing and peer-to-peer technical support to realize universal civil registration,

*Welcoming* the growing momentum around civil registration and vital statistics, including the progress achieved through initiatives in developing countries in Asia and the Pacific and other regions, including Africa, Latin America and the Eastern Mediterranean,

*Applauding* the Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific for its efforts in overseeing the preparations for the Ministerial Conference and the development of the Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific,

*Expressing appreciation* to the co-organizers of the Ministerial Conference and to Thailand as the host Government,

1. *Proclaim* our shared vision that, by 2024, all people in Asia and the Pacific will benefit from universal and responsive civil registration and vital statistics systems that facilitate the realization of their rights and support good governance, health and development;

2. *Affirm* that that the realization of our shared vision depends on achieving the following goals:

(a) **Goal 1:** Universal civil registration of births, deaths and other vital events;

(b) **Goal 2:** All individuals are provided with legal documentation of civil registration of births, death and other vital events, as necessary, in order to claim identity, civil status and ensuing rights;

(c) **Goal 3:** Accurate, complete and timely vital statistics (including on causes of death), based on registration records, are produced and disseminated;

3. *Declare* the years 2015 to 2024 to be the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade for Asia and the Pacific to achieve our shared vision;

4. *Endorse* the Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, so as to accelerate and focus the efforts of Governments and development partners and, thereby, to achieve our shared vision;

5. *Commit* to the implementation of the Regional Action Framework so that the shared vision, goals and national targets can be achieved through comprehensive, integrated and concerted efforts by all relevant stakeholders in the following action areas:

(a) Political commitment;

- (b) Public engagement, participation and generating demand;
- (c) Coordination;
- (d) Policies, legislation and implementation of regulations;
- (e) Infrastructure and resources;
- (f) Operational procedures, practices and innovations;
- (g) Production, dissemination and use of vital statistics;

6. *Also commit*, by the end of 2015, to establish an effective and sustainable national civil registration and vital statistics coordination mechanism, develop a national improvement strategy, including monitoring and evaluation, set national targets for 2024 and initiate the other implementation steps of the Regional Action Framework;

7. *Resolve* to give particular attention and take measures to reduce all barriers to civil registration and to ensure the registration of vital events among hard-to-reach and marginalized populations and to build national capacities related to death registration and ascertaining causes of death;

8. *Call upon* development partners to provide technical and financial assistance to countries in a coordinated manner that is conducive to a comprehensive and integrated approach to improving civil registration and vital statistics;

9. *Invite* all concerned development partners, including the following, to join and contribute to the regional partnership supporting the implementation of the Regional Action Framework:

- (a) Subregional organizations, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and the Economic Cooperation Organization, and initiatives, such as the Pacific Vital Statistics Action Plan (2011-2014) under the auspices of the Brisbane Accord Group, to promote subregional cooperation for the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics;
- (b) Development cooperation agencies, to strengthen the effectiveness of their plans and programmes on civil registration and vital statistics and related areas of development assistance in line with national policies and priorities;
- (c) Bilateral and multilateral development agencies, banks and other financial institutions, such as the World Bank Group and the Asian Development Bank, to harness their technical and financial resources for supporting the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics;
- (d) The United Nations system, including programmes, funds and specialized agencies, to jointly deliver support for improving civil registration and vital statistics, including through effective use of existing mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels, such as the United Nations Development Group, country teams, and disaster and emergency planning and response teams;
- (e) Non-governmental and civil society organizations, to support Governments and foster continuous responsiveness to the aspirations and needs of all people, including hard-to-reach and marginalized populations;
- (f) The private sector, to promote innovation and strengthen efforts to form public-private partnerships;

- (g) Academic and research institutions and professional societies, to collect, develop and disseminate best practices, innovation and technical resources;

10. *Designate* oversight for the Regional Action Framework and custodianship of the Decade to the Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific reporting through the Commission;

11. *Call upon* members, associate members and development partners to support the further development of an Asian and Pacific regional network of civil registrars, and, in particular, its contribution to the implementation of the Regional Action Framework;

12. *Encourage* members and associate members to advocate for the inclusion of civil registration and vital statistics in the development agenda beyond 2015;

13. *Recommend* that the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems be included in United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks;

14. *Request* the Executive Secretary:

- (a) To accord priority to supporting members and associate members in the full, effective and sustainable implementation of the present Declaration and Regional Action Framework, in cooperation with other concerned entities;
- (b) To provide secretariat support for the implementation of the Regional Action Framework;
- (c) To oversee regional reviews of progress in implementing the Regional Action Framework in 2020 and 2025;
- (d) To mainstream the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics systems into the work of the secretariat;
- (e) To continue engagement with development partners to ensure the ongoing, coordinated and effective operation of the regional partnership;
- (f) To submit the outcome of this Ministerial Conference to the Commission at its seventy-first session.

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