Activities of the expert group on improving the collection, reporting and analysis of crime data

Report of the Executive Director

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 2009/25, entitled “Improving the collection, reporting and analysis of data to enhance knowledge on trends in specific areas of crime”, the Economic and Social Council requested the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to establish an open-ended intergovernmental expert group, to be convened at least once between sessions of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, to prepare recommendations on the improvement of tools for the collection of relevant crime data, in particular the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems, and of the collection, collation, analysis and reporting processes, in support of the ongoing work of UNODC in that area.

2. The United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems has been used since the early 1990s to collect statistics on crime and criminal justice from virtually all Member States. In its resolution 2009/25, the Council suggested a number of general topics for the expert group to consider with a view to the improvement of the Survey questionnaire and process. These included the need to simplify and improve the Survey; the possibility of using a shorter, annual questionnaire containing a core set of questions and thematic modules; and
the importance of learning from other UNODC data-collection mechanisms, including in terms of the use of modern technologies, where feasible.

3. In the same resolution, the Council requested that a report on the activities of the expert group be submitted to the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice at its nineteenth session.

4. The questionnaire for the Eleventh United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems was sent to Member States on 1 September 2009; it incorporated a number of changes on a pilot basis. In particular, the structure of the questionnaire was revised so as to include a core section (broken down into four parts, as in the past: police, prosecution, courts and prisons) and two thematic modules, one on the topic of the thematic discussion of the nineteenth session of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (trafficking in cultural property) and one on trafficking in persons. Other changes included the electronic dissemination of the questionnaire in Excel format and the increased possibility for respondents to provide metadata and to report data from previous years. These revisions were carried out with a view to making the data collection an annual process.

II. Conclusions and recommendations

5. At its meeting held in Buenos Aires from 8 to 10 February 2010, the expert group produced the following conclusions and recommendations.

6. In order to simplify and improve the reporting system of the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems, it was recommended that UNODC, in consultation with Member States and relevant regional bodies, develop a protocol for the identification of agencies responsible for responding to the questionnaire. As in different countries different organizations may be responsible for completing the Survey, the protocol may require each Member State to identify for UNODC a focal point responsible for responding.

7. The expert group recognized that the value of statistics lay in their analysis and dissemination. It also recognized that enhanced analysis and dissemination of Survey data could contribute to an increased response rate if Member States were better able to see the use to which reported data were put. It recommended that results from the Survey be disseminated regularly in an electronic format conducive to data analysis, to be facilitated by the preparation of basic data tabulation. The group recommended that, if sufficient resources were made available, UNODC prepare annual global trend analyses of selected types of crime, to be disseminated through the UNODC website and, if possible, in hard copy form.

8. UNODC should continue to strengthen links with relevant international and regional organizations, institutes of the United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme network and individual Member States in Survey follow-up and checking of data. Furthermore, efforts towards joint data collection with relevant regional bodies should be continued. The group acknowledged that

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1 The report on the meeting (UNODC/CCPCJ/EG.2/2010/2) will be made available to the Commission.
much work on the analysis of data was currently carried out by experts and institutions on a voluntary basis. Recognizing the capacity required for this endeavour, the group called upon Member States to provide the necessary extrabudgetary resources.

9. It was recommended that law enforcement and criminal justice data on drug-related crime be collected through the Survey and the UNODC annual report questionnaire, retaining the wording of questions as in the annual report questionnaire. The Survey questions should maintain the breakdowns by age and gender but should be limited to the overall category “all illicit drugs”.

10. The expert group recommended that, where practicable, data on selected types of crime be supplemented by data, statistics and estimations from other research that countries may be using to measure such crimes and relevant information from victimization surveys.

11. In order to provide data that cover all relevant aspects of crime, the Survey should ensure that relevant questions (including those on victimization and persons suspected, arrested, accused, prosecuted, convicted and detained) be formulated in such a way as to elicit sex-disaggregated data.

12. It was recommended that future rounds of the Survey be conducted annually in order to provide the international community with information that is as timely as possible, adopting a core and modular structure similar to that utilized in the pilot Eleventh Survey, including sections on police, prosecution, court and prison statistics, as well as two thematic modules.

13. The core Survey should retain its coverage of the entire criminal justice system, including through the collection of data on police-recorded offences; persons suspected, arrested and accused; persons prosecuted; persons convicted; and persons detained. The core Survey should retain a focus on “traditional” offences, including homicide, violent crime (assault, sexual violence, rape and robbery), property crimes (theft, motor vehicle theft and burglary), drug-related crimes (possession, use and trafficking) and kidnapping for ransom.

14. The group recommended that the core section of the questionnaire allow respondents to include extended metadata, especially as regards the coverage of the information provided. In order to increase the policy relevance of information, the Survey should aim to collect enhanced contextual information. In particular, the group recommended that the questionnaire allow for the provision of contextual information on homicide and armed violence, such as information about offenders and victims, possible causes, weapons used and locations.

15. One of the modules should collect data on the topics of the annual thematic debate of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, and the other should cover, on a rotating basis, one of the following areas: corruption and counterfeiting, environmental crime, crime involving armed violence, organized crime, trafficking in persons, smuggling of migrants, cybercrime, identity theft or money-laundering. Selected issues covered by the modules could be progressively introduced into the core questionnaire on the basis of availability of data and definitional work at the international level.

16. In order to facilitate the reporting process for Member States, it was recommended that future rounds of the Survey continue to use an electronic format.
for distribution and data collection, similar to that utilized in the Eleventh Survey. In this respect, it may be most efficient to use a Web-based platform for questionnaire distribution and data entry.

17. The expert group recognized that resources were required to sustain an efficient system for the collection and analysis of crime and criminal justice statistics and called upon Member States to provide the necessary extrabudgetary resources to create a long-term sustainable approach to data collection.