

25 March 2010

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

I. Introduction

1. The meeting of the expert group on improving the collection, reporting and analysis of crime data was convened pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 2009/25, entitled “Improving the collection, reporting and analysis of data to enhance knowledge on trends in specific areas of crime”. In that resolution, the 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, as well as the collection, collation, analysis and reporting processes, in support of the ongoing work of UNODC in that area. In the same resolution, the Council suggested a number of general considerations 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. The activities of the expert group in this respect are presented in E/CN.15/2010/14.

2. The Government of Argentina offered to act as host to the first meeting of the expert group. Pursuant to Council resolution 2009/25, the expert group held a meeting in Buenos Aires from 8 to 10 February 2010.



II. Organization of the meeting

A. Opening of the meeting

3. The meeting of the expert group on improving the collection, reporting and analysis of crime data was opened by the Under-Secretary for Criminal Policy of Argentina, Juan Martín Mena.

B. Attendance

4. The meeting was attended by 36 participants from 17 countries and one regional organization. A list of participants is contained in the annex to the present report.

C. Election of officers

5. The following officers were elected by consensus:

Chair: Eugenio Curia (Argentina)

Vice-Chair: Elizabeth Gikuni (Kenya)

Rapporteur: Frits Huls (Netherlands)

D. Adoption of the agenda

6. The expert group adopted the following agenda for its meeting:

1. Election of officers.
2. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work.
3. Consideration of the content and structure of a revised simple and efficient reporting system.
4. Revision of the mechanism to collect and report information.
5. Measures to build capacity of Member States to collect and report information.
6. Conclusions and recommendations.
7. Adoption of the report.

III. Summary of deliberations

7. Participants discussed the general principles that should guide the content and structure of a simplified and improved United Nations system for the collection of data on crime and criminal justice. Speakers noted that the current United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems was a well-developed instrument incorporating many modern principles of questionnaire

design. The Survey was viewed as relatively straightforward to complete, and all types of crime included were generally considered to be relevant.

8. While the primary aim of the Survey was to collect administrative count-based data, there was consensus that in some cases it would also be useful to offer respondent States the opportunity to provide data, statistics or estimates using other available sources. In particular, it might be important to collect data from crime victimization surveys. The group recognized that it was important for the Survey to provide an overview of available data on underlying criminological phenomena rather than to cover only the activities of law enforcement and criminal justice systems.

9. A number of participants highlighted that, in view of the difficulties encountered in collecting and coordinating information within States, a key concern was to the clear identification of the government institution or institutions that should be responsible for completing the questionnaire and communicating with UNODC. Participants agreed that there was no incentive for Member States to respond to questionnaires if data were not disseminated and analysed in a timely manner.

10. The group discussed the structure and content of the core component introduced on a pilot basis in the Eleventh Survey. Participants were in agreement that the core and modular structure made the Survey an effective and efficient way to collect data. Participants noted that there were no types of crime covered by the Eleventh Survey that were not required. Moreover, a number of speakers proposed that it would be important to progressively expand the core questionnaire to cover new (and not so new) types of crime, including money-laundering, cybercrime and identity theft. Other speakers cautioned against the low level of comparability of data on these types of crime, particularly with regard to countries that had not promulgated specifically relevant criminal laws. The group agreed that it would nonetheless be important to collect information on such crimes, if necessary using data other than those recorded by law enforcement agencies, such as data from national rapporteurs, research institutions and victimization surveys.

11. The group noted further that a number of types of crime addressed in the questionnaire were subtypes of broader categories of crime. It was deemed important to make this clear in the questionnaire, thus allowing Member States to respond at the level of detail for which statistics were available. The group also noted that metadata on counting rules should be expanded and made clearer, especially with regard to data coverage, and that certain definitions could be further clarified. One participant suggested that the questionnaire should allow for further indications as to whether relevant legislation existed with respect to crimes covered by the questionnaire.

12. With regard to questions on drug-related crime, the group agreed that it made sense for both drug and crime data-collection systems to include such questions. The group suggested that Survey questions should be identical to those contained in the annual reports questionnaire on drugs, but with questions only on the category "all illicit drugs". It was noted that it would be important to collect more extensive gender-disaggregated data on identified victims and persons suspected, prosecuted and convicted.

13. The group approved of the proposal to include thematic modules, such as those piloted in the Eleventh Survey questionnaire, in future waves of the Survey. It was noted that it would be important to understand the challenges faced by Member States in providing information on the more complex types of crime envisaged for inclusion in the modules. The group agreed that it was appropriate for one module to reflect the topic of the thematic debate of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice and for the other to be used for the collection of data on other complex types of crime, such as cybercrime, organized crime or corruption, on a rotating basis. The Chair informed the group that cybercrime and money-laundering were currently under consideration in the informal consultations on the Twelfth Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. The group agreed that it would be possible to develop Survey modules for data collection on those topics.

14. The expert group discussed the revision of the mechanism to collect and report information on crime and criminal justice. The group noted that the current mechanism (distribution of the questionnaire by note verbale, with a copy sent to national statistical offices) created a number of challenges in terms of data coordination, including the difficulties involved in identifying the lead institution for the completion of the questionnaire. A number of speakers stated that it would be useful to have the Survey questionnaire sent to a coordinating institution together with a clearly defined procedure for its completion. One speaker proposed integration of the Survey data-collection tool within national data systems so that data could be uploaded to the tool on a continuous basis and reporting to the United Nations could be performed at defined, scheduled intervals. The group agreed that annual data collection would enable the generation of effective trend analyses. Such a mechanism would be consistent with those established in relation to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the United Nations Convention against Corruption.

15. The group agreed that, to increase the response rate, it would be important to strengthen collaboration with regional organizations such as the Organization of American States and Eurostat, with a view to providing a forum for the discussion of common challenges and good practices.

16. The group welcomed the Excel format of the Eleventh Survey questionnaire and agreed that UNODC should continue to explore the technological development of the Survey, including, subject to funding, the possibility of using a web-based platform. With regard to data dissemination and analysis, one speaker noted the changing nature of expectations with the growth of the Internet. Users required both raw data and concise analyses and conclusions. In this respect, the group agreed that it would be important to establish contacts with experts who could advise on the data tabulations that should be disseminated, as well as the metadata, warnings and analyses that should accompany them. Other speakers highlighted the need to release data in a timely manner so that they could be made available to the public.

IV. Adoption of the report and closure of the meeting

17. On 10 February, the expert group considered and adopted the report on its meeting.

Annex

List of participants

Member States

Algeria	Fayed Hassani
Argentina	Eugenio Curia Juan Martín Mena Ignacio Lombardi Norberto Frontini Esteban Marino Mariano Ciafardini Hernán Olaeta Daniel Fernández Luis D'Angelo Graciela Gándaras Costa María del Pilar Gándaras Costa Carlos Gervasio Landívar Fiorella Canoni
Belarus	Sergei Lukashevich
Brazil	Luciane Patrício Braga de Moraes
Chile	Carolina Zamorano Villa
Colombia	Álvaro Restrepo Hurtado
Kenya	Elizabeth Gikuni
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Abdullatif Elkhazmi
Mexico	Edgar Guerrero Centeno Leticia Sánchez Miranda
Mozambique	José Cumbane
Netherlands	Frits Huls
Peru	Liliam Ballón de Amézaga
Philippines	Arvin de Leon
Russian Federation	Gennadiy J. Pronin Valentin V. Kostrub Maria A. Kuznetsova
Spain	Pedro Ruiz Salvador
Trinidad and Tobago	McDonald Jacob
United State of America	Allen Beck

Regional organizations

Organization of American States

United Nations Secretariat

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
