



## Message From The Chairperson

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself as the new Chairperson of the Vital Statistics Council for Canada, and to welcome Caroline Kaus from Manitoba as the new Chairperson Elect. On behalf of Council I would also like to extend our thanks to Shelley Gibson, the Past Chairperson, for her leadership and dedication to the advancement of the national organization and its member organizations. As the Past Chairperson, Shelley will continue to provide leadership and experience to the Council. I would also like to acknowledge all Council members. The Council is composed of a group of individuals who are dedicated to program development and ensuring that best practices are implemented in order that Canadians receive quality Vital Statistics products and services.

This year's annual meeting of the Vital Statistics Council for Canada took place May 29, 2000 to June 1, 2000 in Ottawa, Ontario. Representatives included the Registrars/Directors of the Vital Statistics programs from the 13 provinces and territories, representatives from Health Statistics Division of Statistics Canada, and representatives from the United States National Association for Public Health Statistics and Information Systems (NAPHSIS) and the National Centre for Health Statistics.

At this year's meeting discussions took place on a number of initiatives and issues that will provide both opportunities and challenges for the Council. An issue of concern and one that has created challenges for Council is the fraudulent use of vital event records, in particular the birth certificate. A birth certificate is frequently the "feeder" document that is used to obtain many other provincial and federal documents, benefits and services, including passports, driver's licences, health care coverage and social benefits, to name a few. It is difficult to determine to what extent the fraudulent use of birth certificates exists in Canada, as it is thought that many cases are not being detected. Nevertheless the cases that have been reported demonstrate that birth certificate fraud results in significant social and monetary costs to the country. And because the penalties for this type of offence are so low, they have had little impact as a deterrent.

At the NAPHSIS meeting held from June 24-28, 2000, in Austin, Texas, a presentation on Detecting and Preventing Fraud in Vital Records was given. A speaker reported that the fraudulent use of birth certificates in the United States has increased significantly. Many examples were provided where fraudulent birth certificates were used by fugitives, petty criminals, drug traffickers, and illegal aliens to obtain a number of official documents and services. It was also reported that although there are different methods used by criminals to obtain a fraudulent birth certificate, impostors account for 85 percent of the birth certificate fraud in the United States. Impostors are hard to detect because if they present all the valid information in an application, it is rare that a birth certificate would not then be automatically provided.

The presentation identified several issues that contribute to birth certificate fraud in the United States, including the lack of consistent policies and procedures for the issuance of birth certificates, a large number of autonomous areas with the responsibility for issuing birth certificates (approximately 7,000 local vital statistics offices), inadequate training and education for vital statistics personnel and users of the birth certificate in detecting fraud, the need for improved security features and standards for certificate stock, the need to identify trends in birth certificate fraud, the lack of adequate penalties when birth certificate fraud is discovered, and the concern that in states where records are open the actual records will be posted on the Internet, thus giving criminals access to records. The presenters also strongly indicated the need for enhanced collaborative relationships between vital statistics programs and the users of vital event documents in the campaign against fraud. A report on birth certificate fraud will be released by fall and will be available on this web site: <http://www.dhhs.gov/progorg/oei/reportindex/htm>

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In Canada, as in the United States, evidence suggests that there is a thriving criminal element that is resourceful and clever when it comes to obtaining birth certificates for fraudulent use. Although we can relate to many of the issues in the United States, we have made significant progress in some areas for deterring fraud. For example, all provincial/territorial jurisdictions use a standard security paper for the issuance of certificates; and for the most part our practices are consistent across the country in the issuance of certificates, while the responsibility for issuing certificates is retained by provincial/territorial vital statistics programs. However, the Council recognizes that these measures do not eliminate fraud and that we must become more knowledgeable about the methods and trends of birth certificate fraud. Therefore, at the May 2000 Vital Statistics Council meeting in Ottawa the Council established a Fraud Committee to examine this issue.

Vital Statistics programs have a responsibility to protect the personal privacy of individuals and to maintain the integrity of our documents. As well, users of our documents must take responsibility for ensuring that practices are in place to deter fraudulent activity. Similar to the United States, enhanced collaborative relationships between Vital Statistics programs, the Council, and the users of our documents will be necessary in the campaign against fraud. ♦

*Thelma Johnston, Chairperson  
Vital Statistics Council for Canada*

## **Birth Registration: A First Step**

A birth certificate is a child's proof of identity and represents the first acknowledgment of his or her significance to the country. Proof of birth is needed for a number of services, and it offers a degree of legal protection. But too few developing nations take birth registration seriously, and rates vary widely within and between countries. Some nations do not even know what percentage of their citizens are registered. All developing countries need to assess their status, set targets for improvement and make sure they fulfill them.

### **Birth registration: Flawed figures**

"The child shall be registered immediately after birth..." mandates article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. But despite almost universal ratification of this human rights treaty, one third of all births – about 40 million babies – go unregistered every year. While the industrialized

nations register virtually all their children, civil registration systems are still rudimentary in many developing countries. Many are uncertain as to what proportion of their children are registered; some do not even have a registration system. For these reasons, the table on the following page presents broad percentages of coverage rather than precise numbers.

The problems in estimating registration coverage include the following:

- While many countries have estimates of the percentage registered, most of these estimates are approximate. Very few countries have made the effort to assess coverage objectively and thoroughly.
- Registration rates differ widely within many developing countries. Cities tend to have higher rates than rural areas because civil registries are centralized. Similarly, babies born in hospitals are more likely to be registered than babies born at home because the registration process often takes place in the hospital.
- In many countries, ethnic minorities have lower rates of registration than the general population.
- Despite the fact that the Convention on the Rights of the Child calls for children to be registered "immediately after birth" many children are registered later in life, such as when they enroll in school.
- Civil registration systems lag in sub-Saharan Africa because of underdevelopment. In some countries, the leftover structures of colonial governments, which in many cases did not register the black population, have impeded progress on registration.
- The responsibility for registering children at birth typically falls on mothers, adding another burden to their heavy workload. This is especially true in Africa and southern Asia where more than half of babies are born outside of hospitals.

The evidence of improvement in birth registration coverage is mixed. While many countries report increasing rates of registration, coverage is falling in others. Rates in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have declined in the past 10 years due to the disintegration of administrative structures following the break-up of the Soviet Union. China's registration system is being strained by an increasingly mobile population.

Registration must not be left to chance. Better quality and more timely information is vital to fulfilling children's rights and for national planning, and it is not that difficult to obtain. Countries including Brazil, Pakistan and Turkey have recently used household surveys to assess birth registration coverage.

These surveys also highlight disparities within countries. In Pakistan, for instance, Punjab

Province registers 88% of children, while in North-West Frontier Province the figure is only 46%. Turkey's western region has a coverage rate of 84%, compared to the figure in the east – 56%.

So far, too few countries have taken birth registration seriously. All developing countries need to assess their current status, set specific targets for improvement and follow up with regular monitoring. ♦

## CIVIL RIGHTS LEAGUE TABLE

### Birth Registration

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA		MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA	EAST/SOUTH ASIA AND PACIFIC	AMERICAS			
	Level of Registration		Level of Registration		Level of Registration		
Mauritius	1	Algeria	1	Australia	1	Argentina	1
Gabon	2	Egypt	1	China	1	Brazil	1
Burundi	3	Iran	1	Japan	1	Canada	1
Gambia	3	Israel	1	Korea, Republic	1	Chile	1
Botswana	4	Jordan	1	Malaysia	1	Costa Rica	1
Cameroon	4	Kuwait	1	Mongolia	1	Cuba	1
Chad	4	Lebanon	1	New Zealand	1	Dominican Republic	1
Ghana	4	Libya	1	Singapore	1	El Salvador	1
Guinea	4	Syria	1	Sri Lanka	1	Guatemala	1
Kenya	4	Tunisia	1	Thailand	1	Honduras	1
Mali	4	United Arab Emirates	1	Pakistan	2	Jamaica	1
Mauritania	4	Morocco	2	Philippines	2	Mexico	1
Uganda	4	Turkey	2	Indonesia	3	Trinidad/Tobago	1
Zimbabwe	4	Sudan	4	India	4	United States	1
Angola	5	Yemen	4	Myanmar	4	Uruguay	1
Guinea-Bissau	5	Oman	6	Bangladesh	5	Colombia	2
Lesotho	5	Iraq	No data	Papua New Guinea	5	Panama	2
Liberia	5	Saudi Arabia	No data	Cambodia	6	Paraguay	2
Malawi	5			Bhutan	No data	Peru	2
Mozambique	5	<b>CENTRAL ASIA</b>		Korea, Dem.	No data	Venezuela	2
Niger	5	Armenia	1	Lao Republic	No data	Bolivia	3
Rwanda	5	Azerbaijan	1	Nepal	No data	Nicaragua	3
Sierra Leone	5	Kazakhstan	1	Viet Nam	No data	Ecuador	No data
Zambia	5	Kyrgyzstan	1			Haiti	No data
Eritrea	6	Tajikistan	1				
Ethiopia	6	Turkmenistan	1				
Namibia	6	Uzbekistan	1				
Somalia	6	Afghanistan	6				
Benin	No data	Georgia	No data				
Burkina Faso	No data						
Central African Rep.	No data						
Congo	No data	<i>Every year, about 40 million babies go unregistered—one third of all births.</i>					
Congo, Dem. Rep.	No data						
Côte d'Ivoire	No data						
Madagascar	No data						
Nigeria	No data						
Senegal	No data						
South Africa	No data						
Tanzania	No data						
Togo	No data						

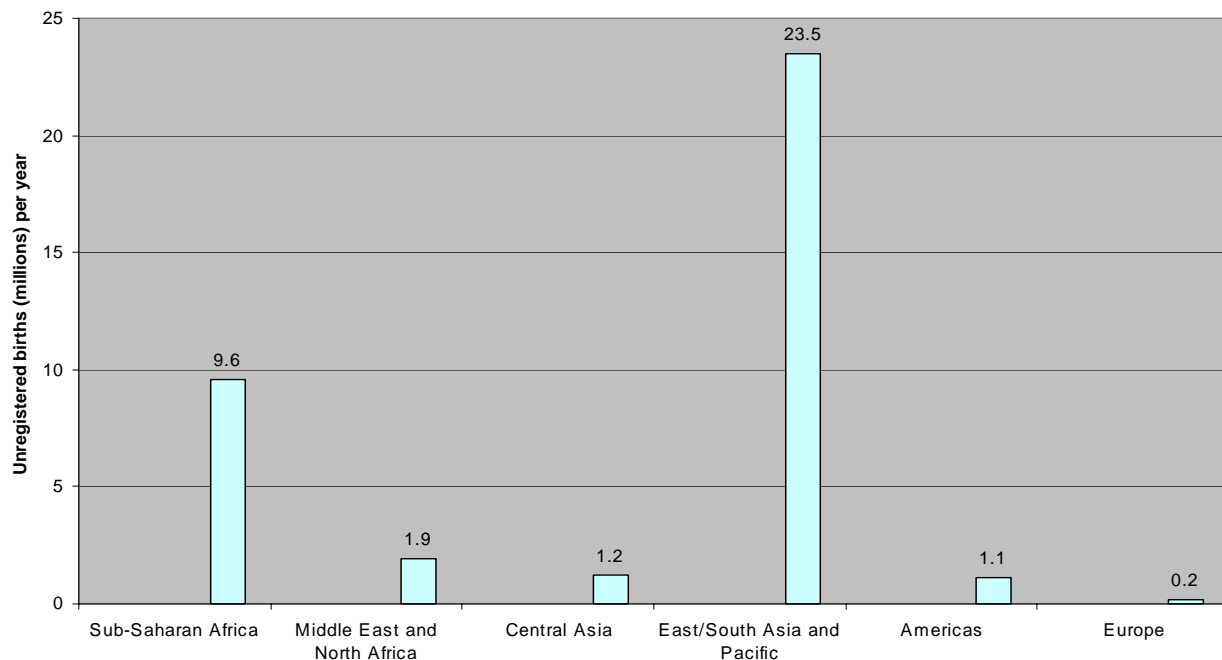
### WHAT THE RANKINGS MEAN

1. 90% and more registered
2. 70% to 89% registered
3. 50% to 69% registered
4. 30% to 49% registered
5. Less than 30% registered
6. No birth registration system

Source: UNICEF

(The preceding article is reprinted from *The Progress of Nations 1998*, a publication of UNICEF: United National Children's Fund, 3 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY. 10017 USA.)

## Regional Disparities: Unregistered births\*



\* Does not include countries for which no data available.

Source: UNICEF

## Vital Statistics Workshop Clarifies Benefits of In-depth Analysis

*Huguette Lavoie  
New Brunswick Vital Statistics*

In May of this year I was given the opportunity to attend a workshop offered by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) in Louisville, Kentucky. This course, entitled "Vital Statistics: Measures and Production," included presentations of the principal measures of vital statistics and their computation as well as techniques for evaluating and improving the quality of data. The group in attendance consisted of personnel involved in the production, presentation and/or analysis of vital statistics information.

The range of topics covered by the workshop was certainly extensive, as can be seen by the following list:

1. Measures of vital events (mortality and natality)
2. Population-at-risk
3. Computation of summary figures (rates, ratios, proportions)

4. Standardization and age adjustment
5. Strong and weak points of measures
6. Privacy and confidentiality
7. Principles of classification
8. Editing data (absolute and conditional)
9. Imputation
10. Tabulation
11. Quality control
12. Relationship between statistical and registration functions

I found the sessions relating to population-at-risk, age adjustment and standardization, and the calculation of confidence intervals used to determine the level of significance in statistics, to be of particular interest. This was especially true in dealing with small counts such as infant deaths, low birth weight, and specific mortality causes. As a result of these sessions, I have acquired a greater appreciation and understanding of additional in-depth analysis of data. I would recommend workshops like this to any persons wishing to upgrade their skill levels with regard to the many aspects of data analysis and statistical interpretation.♦

## **The Council Congratulates Two New Members**

Alberta-based Neil Warner was recently made responsible for that province's Vital Statistics program. Neil is currently Executive Director, Private Agent Services/General Registry for the province of Alberta. Due to an organizational change within Alberta Registries, Vital Statistics is now under a new branch, Private Agent Services/General Registry. Registry agents handle most of the Vital Statistics services, and the organizational change will provide enhanced services to Albertans. Neil, as executive director, is thus also responsible for Vital Statistics.

Mr. Warner has a Master of Arts degree from the University of Alberta. Before he came to Alberta Registries, Mr. Warner held numerous management positions, including: Senior Advisor of the Office of the Deputy Minister of Justice; Director of Regulatory and Administrative Support Branch of Justice; and other management positions in the Driver Improvement Branch, Motor Vehicles Division, and the Driver Control Board. Mr. Warner looks forward to working with his staff and counterparts in the Vital Statistics area.

And to the east, Ontario's Office of the Registrar General is pleased to announce that effective July 4, 2000, Judi Hartman became the new Deputy Registrar General. Judi's previous work experience included working for the Office of the Registrar General from 1992 until 1998 as the Team Manager of Special Projects and the Team Manager of Policy and Legislation. In 1998 she left for the Marketplace Standards and Services Branch as Business Liaison Co-ordinator for the Industry Self-Management Liaison Unit.

More recently, Judi accepted a challenging position with Ontario's Management Board Secretariat as Project Lead for Agency Sector Coordination, an Ontario Public Service initiative. The Ministry and the branch are pleased to have Judi back with the Office of the Registrar General, where her experience, initiative and commitment will be invaluable to changing direction of the office.

The Vital Statistics Council for Canada welcomes both Neil and Judi to the Council and congratulates them on their respective job appointments. ♦

## **DURING A TYPICAL YEAR IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES, 1998**

**The following events were recorded:**

**1,121 LIVE BIRTHS OCCURRED IN THE TERRITORIES TO ITS RESIDENTS**  
6 stillbirths also occurred that year

**172 DEATHS OCCURRED IN THE TERRITORIES TO ITS RESIDENTS**

**135 MARRIAGES WERE SOLEMNIZED IN THE TERRITORIES**

**5,069 VITAL STATISTICS CERTIFICATES WERE ISSUED IN THE TERRITORIES THAT YEAR:**

4,560 birth certificates  
298 marriage certificates  
211 death certificates

*Source: Vital Statistics Office, Northwest Territories*

## VITAL STATISTICS COUNCIL FOR CANADA



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