



## Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
15 February 2006

Original: English

---

### **Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice**

Fifteenth session

Vienna, 24-28 April 2006

Item 3 of the provisional agenda\*

**Work of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime**

### **Results of the meeting of the open-ended expert group on ways and means of improving crime data collection, research and analysis with a view to enhancing the work of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and other relevant international entities**

#### **Note by the Secretary-General\*\***

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice at its fifteenth session the report of the meeting of the open-ended expert group on ways and means on improving crime data collection, research and analysis with a view to enhancing the work of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and other relevant international entities, which was held in Vienna from 8 to 10 February 2006, pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 2005/23 of 22 July 2005.

---

\* E/CN.15/2006.1.

\*\* The present report was submitted late due to the date of the meeting (8-10 February 2006).



**Report of the meeting of the open-ended expert group on  
ways and means of improving crime data collection,  
research and analysis with a view to enhancing the work of  
the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and other  
relevant international entities**

## Contents

| <i>Chapter</i>                                | <i>Paragraphs</i> | <i>Page</i> |
|---|-------------------|-------------|
| I. Introduction . . . . .                     | 1-3               | 3           |
| Background . . . . .                          | 4-6               | 3           |
| II. Conclusions and recommendations . . . . . | 7-23              | 4           |
| III. Organization of the meeting . . . . .    | 24-28             | 5           |
| A. Opening of the meeting . . . . .           | 24                | 5           |
| B. Attendance . . . . .                       | 25                | 6           |
| C. Election of officers . . . . .             | 26                | 6           |
| D. Adoption of the agenda . . . . .           | 27                | 6           |
| E. Adoption of the report . . . . .           | 28                | 7           |
| IV. Summary of the discussion . . . . .       | 29-75             | 7           |
| Annex. List of participants . . . . .         |                   | 13          |

## I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 2005/23 of 22 July 2005, entitled “Strengthening reporting on crime”, the Economic and Social Council recommended that the Secretary-General convene, subject to the availability of extrabudgetary resources, an open-ended expert group to consider ways and means of improving crime data collection, research and analysis with a view to enhancing the work of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and other relevant international entities, in particular the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), as appropriate, to enhance international cooperation and law enforcement; and requested the Secretary-General to submit the results of the meeting of the open-ended expert group to the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice at its fifteenth session.
2. Experts in crime data collection from different regions were invited to attend the meeting, and all Member States were informed about the preparations and the provisional agenda for the meeting.
3. The present report is submitted to the Commission pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 2005/23.

## Background

4. Within the United Nations, the collection of data on crime statistics began in the 1970s, following the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 3021 (XXVII) of 18 December 1972. Member States were invited to provide data on crime, initially as general information on crime prevention and control and measures taken and subsequently by means of a detailed questionnaire. The first of the United Nations surveys of crime trends and operations of criminal justice systems, covering the period 1970-1975, was launched in 1976. It was followed by surveys covering the periods 1975-1980, 1980-1986, 1986-1990, 1990-1994, 1995-1997, 1998-2000 and 2001-2002. The questionnaire for the Ninth United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems, covering the period 2003-2004, was sent to ministries of foreign affairs and national statistical offices in July and August 2005; it included an annex containing a form for a survey of national capacities for the collection of data on crime prevention and criminal justice.
5. The main goal of the United Nations Survey is to collect data on the incidence of reported crime and the operations of criminal justice systems (police, prosecution, courts, prisons and penal institutions). Data and other information on the various United Nations surveys of crime trends and operations of criminal justice systems are available on the website of UNODC ([www.unodc.org/unodc/crime\\_cicp\\_surveys.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/crime_cicp_surveys.html)). An attempt to examine more closely organized crime was made by means of a special questionnaire attached to the Fourth United Nations Survey, covering the period 1986-1990. In the meantime, victim surveys started becoming an important tool for assessing crime issues. The International Crime Victim Survey was first conducted in 1989 and was repeated approximately every four years (1992, 1996, 2000, 2004-2005), with a prominent role being played by UNICRI.

6. As regards the analysis of crime trends, UNODC published the *Global Report on Crime and Justice*<sup>1</sup> in 1999. In 2005, a draft report entitled “Trends in crime and justice” was prepared with UNICRI and distributed as a work in progress at the Eleventh United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, held in Bangkok, from 18 to 25 April 2005; it was subsequently made available to the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice at its fourteenth session. Those reports emphasized that data collection on crime phenomena is not sufficient to provide an accurate description of emerging problems, especially as regards organized crime, trafficking in human beings and new forms of crime.

## **II. Conclusions and recommendations**

7. The expert group agreed on a number of conclusions and recommendations, which are presented below.

8. The expert group considered that there were three fundamental purposes of the collection of data on crime and criminal justice for the United Nations: (a) as a duty of the United Nations—being the custodian of multilateral instruments—to collect information from Member States on the subject of the multilateral instruments or conventions; (b) to become a repository of information on magnitude and trends, including forecasting; (c) for programming (including the delivery of technical assistance) and evaluation purposes, at the national and international levels. The expert group identified and discussed the strengths and weaknesses of current data collection systems and suggested strategies to achieve data collection purposes, especially the second and third purposes referred to above.

9. The current questionnaire used for the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems should be revised and refocused. That would imply reducing its length, identifying the main issues to be covered, improving and clarifying definitions and collecting data on the context and metadata. Further consultations with experts would be required to redesign the questionnaire.

10. Efforts should be made to achieve a substantial improvement in the response rate so that responses are received at least from a majority of the countries on each continent. Further efforts should be made to establish a more effective procedure for reaching the appropriate provider of information.

11. As regards periodicity, a core annual version of the questionnaire for the United Nations Survey could be developed, to be supplemented by additional modules, with longer intervals, on specific topics.

12. Further efforts should be made in interactive checking of data quality, including through greater involvement of the institutes of the United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme network and the regional offices of UNODC.

13. A study to assess the extent to which the data are used by different users, as well as identifying their profile, would be useful in improving the focus of the questionnaire.

14. Victim surveys were important in complementing the administrative statistics. The United Nations should play a role in further promoting the conducting of victim surveys, especially in developing countries, not only among the general population, but also among businesses and certain target groups within the general population (such as women).
15. Qualitative and quantitative measures on organized crime and corruption should be developed. That could be done through the identification of relevant indicators and “markers” (i.e. direct or indirect measures of phenomena).
16. In the absence of a common definition of organized crime, a dialogue with the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime should be initiated to develop a base of understanding about the scope of this concept for data collection purposes.
17. For purposes of data collection and analysis, a dialogue should also be initiated with the Conference of the States Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption.
18. Integration of data collection and research should be promoted in order to establish estimates, magnitude and trends of crime, assess risks and forecast trends, as well as to monitor trends in criminal justice operations and output.
19. The United Nations should build the capacity of countries, at their request, for the production, collection and analysis of data on crime and criminal justice, including by acting as a coordinator of assistance to Member States. The United Nations should also act as a repository of methodologies for data collection, analysis and dissemination (best practices), developing guidelines and promoting the use of the *Manual for the Development of a System of Criminal Justice Statistics*.<sup>2</sup>
20. The United Nations should be a repository of information on victim surveys and data collection systems. As regards victim surveys, that could be achieved by collecting information on the methodology of victimization surveys conducted in all countries.
21. The United Nations should aim at combining findings based on statistics, victim surveys and relevant data on transnational organized crime and corruption.
22. UNODC, UNICRI and other United Nations entities, as well as intergovernmental bodies, should collaborate in order to develop synergies, avoid duplication and identify common areas of concern and objectives.
23. Adequate resources should be made available to make it possible for these recommendations to be implemented effectively.

### **III. Organization of the meeting**

#### **A. Opening of the meeting**

24. The meeting of the open-ended expert group on ways and means of improving crime data collection, research and analysis was held in Vienna from 8 to

10 February 2006. The meeting was opened by the Chief of the Policy Analysis and Research Branch of UNODC.

## **B. Attendance**

25. The meeting was attended by 15 experts from 13 countries. Eight institutes of the United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme network, specialized agencies in the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations were represented by observers. A list of participants is contained in the annex to the present report.

## **C. Election of officers**

26. The following officers were elected by consensus:

*Chairman:* Ernesto Ugo Savona (Italy)

*Vice-Chairmen:* Celia Leones (Philippines)  
Tulio Kahn (Brazil)  
Peter Gastrow (South Africa)

*Rapporteur:* Marcelo Fernando Aebi (Switzerland)

## **D. Adoption of the agenda**

27. The meeting adopted the following agenda:

1. Opening of the meeting.
2. Election of officers.
3. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work.
4. Task Force 1. United Nations conventions against transnational organized crime and corruption.
5. Task Force 2. Dissemination and policy use of data.
6. Task Force 3. Issues for developing countries.
7. Task Force 4. General methodological issues and victim surveys.
8. Task Force 5. Police data.
9. Task Force 6. Court, prosecution and prison data.
10. Overarching issues, conclusions and recommendations on crime data collection.
11. Adoption of the report and closing of the meeting.

## **E. Adoption of the report**

28. At its 6th meeting, on 10 February, the expert group considered and adopted its report.

## **IV. Summary of the discussion**

29. At the 1st meeting, on 8 February, the Chief of the Policy Analysis and Research Branch noted that the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems provided coverage for a number of issues, but much remained to be done in measuring the extent of crime in societies. Much of the work had been done jointly with UNICRI. The point of view of victims was missing in international statistics. Conducting the International Crime Victim Survey was a more expensive and demanding task than compiling administrative statistics and was generally limited to developed countries. National ownership of data collection systems and data was an important issue: data produced by Member States had much more importance than data produced by an international organization. He stated that the objectives of the meeting were as follows:

(a) To assess strengths and weaknesses of the current data collection system, the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems, including the scope and periodicity of the Survey;

(b) To identify ways to expand data collection to include offences introduced by the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (General Assembly 55/25, annex I) and the United Nations Convention against Corruption (Assembly resolution 58/4, annex);

(c) To propose improvements in data collection, both for administrative statistics and victim surveys, taking into account the needs of data users, in particular in developing countries;

(d) To discuss ways to improve the analysis and dissemination of collected data.

30. A representative of UNODC introduced the UNODC strategy, which had recently been developed within the ongoing United Nations management reform resulting from the 2005 World Summit Outcome (General Assembly resolution 60/1). He noted that the mission of UNODC would contain a mandate to help develop, promote and implement international instruments and standards. Standards would also include methods for carrying out international research and data collection in the areas of drugs and crime. Policy analysis and policy advice, as fundamental UNODC functions, needed to be based on sound data collection, not only looking at historical data, but also focusing on forecasting and assessment of risk.

31. The Director of UNICRI drew the attention of the meeting to the fact that, according to Economic and Social Council resolution 2005/23, the expert group should consider ways and means of improving not only data collection, but also research and analysis.

32. It was noted that Task Force 1 dealt with transnational organized crime and corruption and highlighted the implications for a data collection strategy that was becoming increasingly important for predicting future trends. It was also noted that data should enhance the understanding of organized crime and corruption and anticipate what was coming.

33. It was agreed that definitions on organized crime and corruption diverged widely at the national level. For purposes of data collection, efforts should be made to develop common and, if possible, measurable definitions and indicators.

34. It was stated that the data collected often referred to activities of organized criminal groups. That was linked to the fact that little information was available on offences specifically qualified as organized crime. Some speakers suggested making a move from a quantitative approach to a qualitative approach and making greater use of indirect indicators.

35. Some speakers suggested borrowing terminology from evidence-based medicine, which made use of “markers” to predict the presence of diseases. A similar approach might be adopted to assess crime. “Markers” (including administrative and survey and/or perception data) could be used for a battery of pilot tests in different regions.

36. Some speakers suggested initiating a dialogue with the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Conference of the States Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption and to propose a study on how the convention definitions were used by Member States, what the definitions at the national level were and how they were used.

37. It was noted that Task Force 2 dealt with issues of dissemination and policy use of data. It was agreed that information should come not only from official government data sources, but also from independent sources. Often administrative data only referred to the operations of law enforcement and criminal justice systems and thus needed to be complemented by other sources (notably victim surveys) to provide information on the crime situation. A good indicator of crime should include both aspects.

38. The United Nations Survey might have limited applicability in making policy at the national level but was useful for evidence-based policy research. It would be useful to have more background or context information, perhaps by providing a brief example of the context in which a crime could occur. That would help to prevent data from being used for unintended purposes.

39. The expert group discussed the risk of establishing country rankings. The producers of international collections of data discouraged benchmarking, but it was nevertheless done, especially by the media. In this respect, it was stressed that data should remain freely available but must include information on the caveats of using them for benchmarking. In particular, an effort should be made to provide clear information, accompanied by accurate definitions, context and examples.

40. The expert group was of the view that users of the data were policymakers, practitioners, researchers and the mass media. Each of those users had different needs and used the data for different purposes. The need to analyse the access to the website of the United Nations Survey was discussed.



41. It was noted that the United Nations Survey had a special role in helping developing countries to define their crime statistics. UNODC could assist in building capacity, by using the *Manual for the Development of a System of Criminal Justice Statistics* as a training tool.
42. The expert group agreed that the United Nations should aim at collecting data on an annual basis rather than on a biennial basis. It would be possible to identify a core questionnaire for annual data collection, while additional information could be collected at longer intervals.
43. Publications should be made available in hardcopy and in electronic form, on the website. They should contain not only statistics, but also meta-information, information about how the data were collected and what was in the data. Raw data might not be the best form of dissemination. The need for further interactive checking of data quality, possibly with the assistance of the institutes of the United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme network and the regional offices of UNODC, was emphasized.
44. The ongoing process in the European Union of the development of comparable statistics on crime and criminal justice was presented. Discussion suggested that the United Nations could work closely with regional organizations in pursuing the long-term goal of producing comparable statistics.
45. It was stressed that the comparability of data largely depended on their quality. In many developing countries, there was no mechanism for the collection, analysis and publication of crime and criminal justice data on a regular basis. A recommendation to set up a mechanism for the collection of data on a regular basis was discussed.
46. It was noted that Task Force 3 dealt with issues for developing countries. One expert noted that countries with high levels of serious crime might have low rates of crime reported to the police.
47. It was stated that statistically representative victim surveys had helped to identify risk areas and to determine the profiles of potential victims. In order to bridge gaps in data, the expert group discussed the possibility of developing standard reporting formats for issues related to women and children; improving the reporting systems of all agencies; promoting the establishment of national information systems; developing statistical workplans; promoting statistical capacity-building; and improving the quality and standardization of statistical reports on crime and criminal justice.
48. It was noted that in General Assembly resolution 58/4, in which the Assembly adopted the United Nations Convention against Corruption, the return of illegally transferred funds was mentioned numerous times, thus indicating that it was an important issue to be dealt with.
49. It was stated that the United Nations Survey appeared to be useful in developing countries. It was sometimes used by local statistical offices as a means of encouraging governments to improve their data collection. It might also encourage governments to be more transparent by making crime data, which were often considered confidential, more available to the public. However, the response rate of the United Nations Survey was extremely low. That might be attributable to the excessive burden posed by the questionnaire.

50. In some countries, it could be that the designated person or institution never received the questionnaire or the process of dispatching the questionnaire to the designated respondent took so long that the deadline for submitting the completed questionnaire could not be respected. The group recommended that priority be given to the identification of the responsible agencies.

51. The expert group emphasized that, in preventing crime, the building capacity of developing countries to monitor crime trends was important.

52. The importance of national ownership of the data was stressed on many occasions. That was particularly important regarding victim surveys.

53. It was noted that Task Force 4 dealt with general methodological issues and victim surveys. The expert group noted that police records were an important source of information; however, rather than representing a reliable measure of trends in crime, such records were a product of police activity, increasingly affected by better surveillance and targeting, increased numbers of police officers and changes in recording practices. For those reasons, police data were not usually useful in cross-country comparisons and had limited value for the purposes of evaluating the impact of crime prevention programmes. It was important to collect information obtained through victim surveys, improve data collection techniques and discuss the methodological aspects of the quality and comparability of data. The ongoing joint effort by the Economic Commission for Europe and UNODC to collect information on victim surveys was an example of activities in that area.

54. It was stated that the United Nations Survey should be used as a basis for building capacity in developing countries. The development of a core questionnaire would facilitate that. The expert group discussed the issue of multiple sources of information and stressed the importance of interactive checking of data quality. Although resources might be limited, such checking could be facilitated by providing countries with copies of earlier responses.

55. The issue of which institution was responsible for the questionnaire was discussed. When both the permanent missions to the United Nations and the national statistical offices were addressed, as was the case with the Ninth Survey, the response rate appeared to be higher.

56. It was noted that full ownership by countries would enhance the impact of victim surveys. However, for full comparability of the results, it might be necessary to have overall coordination of data collection. For example, the rapid increase in the use of mobile telephones might have reduced the possibility of obtaining a representative sample through interviews conducted using landline telephones. International surveys were currently being conducted among the general population, women and businesses. The costs related to victim surveys were also discussed.

57. The United Nations could act as a repository of information on trends and methodologies. The importance of contextualizing the information was stressed. National ownership should not be blindly applied as a slogan but should become true capacity to produce quality data. As a result, data collection would become an activity carried out jointly by the United Nations and the country involved.

58. The example of the *European Sourcebook of Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics* was presented. It was based on a network of experts who provided information on common definitions, putting the data into context.

59. It was noted that Task Force 5 dealt with police statistics. International police data were collected by the United Nations from its Member States, by the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) from its member States, by the Home Office of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from member States of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (this collection was currently part of the programme of the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat)), by the European Sourcebook project from member States of the Council of Europe and by the World Health Organization on the basis of registration data from its member States.
60. The expert group suggested that the quality of data could be improved by sharing information and preventing unnecessary duplication of efforts in data collection, as well as adding definitional or context information. Some experts suggested follow-up involving inter-agency meetings.
61. The United Nations should make an effort to ensure understanding and comparability of definitions used throughout the questionnaire.
62. It was stressed that the person or institution responsible for providing the data in each country was very important. The United Nations Survey might not receive adequate attention and, as a result, poor data might be collected.
63. The Interpol collection of police statistics showed that the response rate had been declining and responses were often received from countries that did not respond to the United Nations Survey.
64. The expert group suggested establishing consultations on how to improve the questionnaire by shortening it.
65. It was emphasized that a fragmented data collection system might lead to underestimates of crime. It might be desirable to triangulate data from different sources.
66. The expert group suggested carrying out an assessment of the resources available to the United Nations for doing work in the area of data collection on crime and criminal justice. That work might entail having objectives for developing countries (capacity-building) that were different than those for developed countries (trend analysis). Resources and funding from voluntary contributions needed to be added.
67. It was noted that Task Force 6 dealt with courts, prosecution and prison data. It was stated that the United Nations Survey had the potential of worldwide coverage and the strength of encompassing all criminal justice agencies in each State. Its weakness was the low response rate outside Europe. Use of a clearer questionnaire might facilitate a higher response rate. In some cases the questionnaire was in a language that was not spoken in the country in question, which posed an additional burden to the person or institution responsible for completing the questionnaire.
68. It was stated that the questions should be made clearer to avoid any confusion of the concepts involved. A low rate of response to a question might not necessarily indicate that the question was not important.
69. It was noted that, of the three criminal justice sections dealt with by Task Force 6, prison data were the most complete. The prosecution part of the questionnaire for the United Nations Survey had proved to be the most controversial

one. The expert group was informed that the University of Göttingen, in Germany, was carrying out a project on the position of the prosecution in the criminal justice system (monopoly of prosecution, obligation to prosecute etc.). Furthermore, in many countries court statistics were not collected.

70. The examples were presented of statistics of the International Centre for Prison Studies and the Council of Europe (Annual Penal Statistics of the Council of Europe (SPACE)). In particular, it was noted that data were made available on the websites of those organizations. The suggestion was made that the UNODC website might include references to such websites containing international data.

71. The expert group noted that statistics should be collected on “corrections” rather than on “prisons”. The questionnaire for the United Nations Survey should make a distinction between custodial and non-custodial sentencing.

72. It was noted that there was a lack of information on women, juveniles and foreigners in prison.

73. In the general discussion, an example was given of how the results of a study on firearms were important in enabling Brazil to focus on the availability of guns with respect to crime. The homicide rate had gone down markedly in Brazil. That suggested that the availability of data had an impact on actual crime prevention.

74. A set of common elements was described with a view to identifying additional ways to address the issues being discussed. For UNODC, the purposes of data collection were to service the multilateral system, to act as a repository of information on magnitude and trends and to provide evidence for programming, evaluation and technical assistance purposes.

75. The expert group agreed on a set of recommendations to be submitted to the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice at its fifteenth session.

#### *Notes*

<sup>1</sup> Graeme Newman, ed., *Global Report on Crime and Justice* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> United Nations publications, Sales No. E.03.XVII.6.

## Annex

### List of participants

#### Experts

Marcelo Fernando Aebi (Switzerland)  
 Gordon Barclay (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)  
 Mariano Ciafardini (Argentina)  
 Peter Gastrow (South Africa)  
 Erik Grevholm (Sweden)  
 Beata Gruszczynska (Poland)  
 Jianan Guo (China)  
 Tulio Kahn (Brazil)  
 Celia Leones (Philippines)  
 Stephen Mihorean (Canada)  
 Marilyn Rubin (United States of America)  
 Ernesto Ugo Savona (Italy)  
 Paul Smit (Netherlands)  
 Jan van Dijk (Netherlands)  
 Roy Walmsley (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)

#### Observers

##### United Nations research institutes

United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute

##### Regional Institutes of the United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Program network

Asia and Far East Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders

Latin American Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders

European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control, affiliated with the United Nations

African Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders

##### Specialized agencies in the United Nations system

World Health Organization

**Intergovernmental Organizations**

European Commission

International Criminal Police Organization

---