

**The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific Second Ministerial
Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics**

**Statement for Agenda Item 7: The relationship between civil registration, identity management
and vital statistics, and their role in ensuring legal identity in Asia and the Pacific (14:00-15:30),**

Thursday, 18 November 2021

Submitted by Romain Santon, Regional Deputy Director, Vital Strategies

Thank you very much Honorable Chair.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, my name is Romain Santon, I am the Regional Deputy Director for Asia and Pacific for the CRVS Improvement Program of Vital Strategies, a global public health organization, and am based in our Singapore office. Vital Strategies is proud to be a partner in the Bloomberg Philanthropies Data for Health Initiative and is honored to be a co-organizer of the Ministerial Conference.

I am honored to address this session on making the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda a reality in Asia and the Pacific. The Legal Identity Agenda has brought needed clarity to the foundational role the CRVS plays. Translating it into the functional CRVS/ID ecosystem needed to meet both individual and good governance responsibilities is now the challenge.

As indicated in the Background paper on the intersection between civil registration and identity management systems in Asia and the Pacific, good governance and achievement of universal human rights requires access to legal identity, and provision of legal identity is critically important to promote equity and inclusion and access to services. We all know that universal, compulsory, and permanent civil registration, the provision of legal identities and the production of vital statistics, including on causes of death, all play an important role in achieving inclusive, equitable and people-centric development.

In the remainder of my remarks, I would like us to first reflect on the wide and virtuous array of mutually reinforcing benefits at the heart of which is a well-functioning CRVS system that embodies the principles of the Legal Identity Agenda. Second, I will reflect on centrality of leadership and coordination to realize the full potential value of achieving and maintaining universal registration.

As part of the resurgence of interest in CRVS systems, the links between the universal provision and retirement of legal identities, improved cause of death data, evidence-based public-policy making, and efficient service delivery have been explored and written about by many in our CRVS community. We also now understand how to equip member state governments to identify where system improvements of a technical nature are required to enable universal registration, and to implement them. New, technology-enabled solutions are being deployed to support improved business processes for registration. Through the Data for Health Initiative and others, CRVS legal and regulatory frameworks are being updated to enable best practices in registration and vital statistics production and use. In the Kingdom of Cambodia, for example, legislation is being drafted requiring compulsory registration of vital events for all, creating of a population registry, provision of a unique identity, and improved data sharing across CRVS stakeholders for all people living under the country's jurisdiction and citizens living abroad. While population registers may represent an innovation in some country settings, they should be called out for their importance in serving as a connection point for CRVS and ID management systems in many countries.

The midterm report “A snapshot of progress midway through the Asian and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade” clearly documents progress.

Looking ahead, and building on this momentum and given the roadmap provided by the Legal Identity Agenda, we must ask how these system improvements can be translated into maximum impact in the daily lives of policy makers and citizens alike?

In our experience supporting CRVS improvement in low and middle-income countries in the ESCAP region and beyond, we have observed that the success and sustainability of improvements depends on CRVS champions and strong inter-stakeholder collaboration and coordination which are essential at all levels. For example, Bangladesh has a strong, inter-ministerial Cabinet level coordination mechanism with several leaders who can be described as CRVS champions. This high-level leadership, combined with the convening power of the committee helped to broker the smooth collaboration between the central Ministry of Local Government and the Office of the Registrar General. This resulted not only in scaling an improved model of birth and death registration, but to set completeness targets that are tied to the remuneration of certain local civil servants responsible for supporting the country’s drive to universal registration – and a pathway for more people to obtain and benefit from a national ID.

Ensuring close collaboration and coordination between the civil registration, health sector, ID management, and statistical authorities in pursuit of the Legal Identity Agenda is especially important. It is one of the most important steps a country can take. Doing so will result in a more efficient, complete, and pro-active CRVS system producing timely data that are trusted and used.

To conclude, there is a web of relationships required to register births deaths and causes of death universally, translate vital events records into policy-relevant statistics and analyses, formulate policies, implement them, and protect all the individual-level rights enabled by registration. This complex web will only be as strong as the weakest link in this chain. Recent years of investment are bearing fruit in all areas, the pandemic notwithstanding, and provide cause for optimism. Realizing the potential of CRVS to benefit all, however, crucially depends on strong leadership and coordination among all government agencies and stakeholders are key to advancing the systems, to building the interrelations between civil registration and legal identity, and to ultimately ensure that systems are counting everyone and enable efficient service delivery.

Finally, I would be remiss were I not to draw attention to the tragedy of the COVID pandemic – the very reason many of us are gathering for this conference in this virtual manner. The pandemic has not only hampered the smooth functioning of registration services, it has shone a spotlight on our inability to track the human toll it has taken in terms of the lives lost – both directly, and indirectly – in this scourge. As others have said, now is the time to deliver on the promise of CRVS. Getting everyone in the picture in the remainder of the CRVS Decade has never been more possible.

Thank you