

**Census Message
for the Sister Islands
by Deputy Premier, Hon. Julianna O'Connor-Connolly
22 April, 2010**

I. Introduction

It is a pleasure to keynote today's event which marks the official launch of the Census of the Sister Islands in 2010.

The population of the Sister Islands is significantly small relative to Grand Cayman. Because of this, many may have thought that a census of the Sister Islands could be done more than once every ten years. On the other hand, the small population may cause others to question the relevance of having a census at all.

The total population of the Sister Islands has indeed been stable over the past censuses. Records show that this reached 1,486 in the 1960 census. Subsequently, these were recorded at 1,309 in 1970; 1,677 in 1979; 1,474 in 1989; and 1,937 in 1999 which was the last census taken. These population trends may be contrasted with those of Grand Cayman which increased many folds from 7,025 in 1960 to 8,579 in 1970; 15,000 in 1979; 23,881 in 1989 and 37,083 in 1999.

A comparison of these trends may trigger, or have already triggered, a number of questions and studies on the factors that caused these disparate trends.

However, my task today is not to present these questions or analyses. Rather, my aim is to bring us all on a better understanding of the need to continue a record keeping system of these trends such as the census, not for its own sake but for

the sake of the benefits that can be derived from it, for the good of the Sister Islands and the Cayman Islands in general.

II. The aims of Census 2010

The overall benefit that is aimed for in Census 2010, as in the previous censuses, is good governance. Simply put, good governance requires good information for decision-making. The Government in February of this year approved the conduct of Census 2010 with this aim.

In compliance with the Statistics Law (1996 Revision), a Census Order and Census Regulations were approved for drafting by Cabinet in February of this year. Specifically, the Cabinet has approved that a census shall be taken of the population of the Cayman Islands as at October 10, 2010, the designated Census Day.

Census 2010 is expected to give us an accurate count of the total residents of the Islands. However, the Census will also provide us much more than the population count. It shall also provide statistics on our population - our demographic, social and economic characteristics - and housing information

The need for these types of socio-demographic information can never be overemphasized in view of the dynamism of the country's population, its socio-economic performance and challenges.

Population size and its characteristics are a primary consideration in the efficient planning of infrastructure, education, health and other public services during the ensuing decade.

We need to know whether the current levels of public services are aligned with the population level, and the socio-demographic make-up of the residents. In the context of the economic crisis and the need for government to stream-line its operations, this is of significant importance.

It is our vision that the Census database will serve the data needs of national strategic development planning by government.

In addition, it should equally be made available for business planning by the private sector, and other planning and assessment initiatives. It is indeed ideal that planning in the government and in the private sector be based on the same information. This is a strategic way of reducing inconsistencies and at the same time maximizing synergies from the use of public and private resources in developing the country's productive sectors.

Secondly, our country's history is also served best by a census. Censuses provide historical snapshots of a country's development between the periods when they were conducted, capturing the changes in the mix of nationality, economic profiles, challenges and needs. A correlation analysis of all these factors can provide a rich insight on the factors that have impacted Cayman's development over the years. More importantly, they provide policy-makers and planners useful guides in decision-making and planning.

The first official population census of the entire country was in 1802 when total population was listed at 933. We have indeed come a long way as a nation. Subsequent censuses in the Cayman Islands were conducted in 1891, 1911, 1921, 1934, 1943, 1960, 1970, 1979, 1989 and 1999. Much of our people's history is reflected in the growth of total population by 9,135 persons between 1802 and 1970, which exploded to a growth of 29,342 between 1970 and 1999.

Censuses deliver quantitative information concerning development trends. In the 1999 census, for example, it was found that around 15.4 percent of the population in Cayman Brac did not have a health insurance provider; it will be useful to know through Census 2010 whether this has significantly improved since then.

I am pleased that the Census 2010 questionnaire will ask important questions on health insurance, disabilities or impairment. Socio-economic planning can be richly informed by correlating these with age, nationality, highest grade completed or even with districts and employment status.

Many developed societies measure their quality of life in terms of average life span, also known as the average life expectancy of men and women. For example, the United Nations' database show that the Bahamas's average life expectancy for women is 76 years while for men, this is 71 years. Populations of more developed economies are expected to have higher average life expectancies, holding all other socio-economic factors constant. It is unfortunate, however, that the Cayman Islands do not currently have this important indicator. I am pleased to note that the Census 2010 questionnaire will have questions that will allow the measurement of life expectancy of Cayman residents.

I also note that Census 2010 will also involve building a registry of households of good quality. This is a rich source of information on districts and particular areas within a district, allowing us to identify which specific areas have grown more than others. This information should be useful for development planning.

III. Conclusion

Conducting a population and housing census of good quality is arguably the most challenging statistical activity in any country – this is the largest exercise that a national statistical office would undertake. As such, the forthcoming census has to be planned carefully in order to ensure the quality of Census results.

I am pleased to reiterate the commitment of the current Government in supporting Census 2010. Cabinet has approved the drafting of the requisite Census Order and Regulations that comprise the necessary legal mandate for its conduct. The Government has also provided for the funding resources that it requires.

I therefore appeal to all residents of the Cayman Brac and Little Cayman to fully cooperate in the implementation of Census 2010. Let us remember that Census 2010 can be truly a census only if everyone is counted. Participation in the Census is both a right and an obligation.

We also must begin to think critically of how we can make use of the data, and make recommendations on how these can best serve the information needs of all sectors.

I wish to commend the cooperative arrangement between the District Commissioner's Office and the Economics and Statistics Office in preparing and planning for the Census in the Sister Islands. I encourage these two offices to continue operating in this mode in all phases of census preparation, field implementation and post-field dissemination. In addition, the current budget-

cutting exercise of the Government makes this cooperation imperative, so that the Census can be carried out in a cost-effective manner. Our ultimate aim is to produce high quality data from the Census 2010.

Good day. May the good Lord bless us with a successful Census 2010 in the Sister Islands.