



Dr. Munir Sheikh
Chief Statistician
Statistics Canada
Ottawa

July 20, 2009

By post and email

Dear Dr. Sheikh,

Re: Long-form census

I am writing to you today on behalf of both the non-governmental members of the National Advisory Committee on Culture Statistics (NACCS) and the Board of Governors of the Canadian Conference of the Arts (CCA). I wish to bring to your attention the serious concerns we have regarding the decision to abandon the compulsory long-form Census of Population in favour of a voluntary sample National Household Survey.

While NACCS members understand that Statistics Canada had no say in this extraordinary decision, nor was it consulted in advance by the government, we want to register with you our complete dismay and total disagreement with such a measure.

It is NACCS members' opinion that a census, or some other instrument that lists all individuals in a population, is required to do proper design of voluntary sample surveys. As you know, trying to use a sample household survey, in place of a census, to design social or household surveys will effectively undermine the entire statistical system as it relates to non-business data. Furthermore, a voluntary sample household survey cannot be used to design or validate another voluntary household or individual survey.

Governments at all levels and culture organisations use the census directly or indirectly to help assess needs and plan and evaluate programs. An understanding of the changing demographics of individual communities and neighbourhoods is essential when planning culture programs, designing cultural infrastructure, etc.

We are particularly concerned about the impact this decision will have on our knowledge of the cultural workforce. While the census is not a perfect instrument to collect data on artists, it is still far preferable to a voluntary sample survey, which will be even less likely to capture

information on artists and culture workers. It is indeed highly unlikely that low paid artists and other types of culture workers will have the time or interest to provide the kind of information required for a household survey if it is voluntary. They will therefore be part of the several underrepresented elements of the workforce and of Canadian society in general. The Canadian Conference of the Arts, the Cultural Human Resources Council and all their member organisations rely on census data to provide information about culture workers in Canada.

From a heritage perspective, we also specifically share the concerns expressed by historians and genealogists with regards to the impact of abandoning the compulsory long-form census in favour of a voluntary household survey.

It is our understanding that the new approach ordered by the government will cost Statistics Canada (i.e. Canadian taxpayers) an extra \$ 30 million to administer. To this, one must add the considerable costs which will be borne by other elements of Canadian society for data that will become increasingly less reliable over time and which will be impossible to compare from one survey to the other.

We note with interest that in 2003, the U.S. Census Bureau produced, at the request of Congress, a report in which it outlined the impact of abandoning the compulsory long-form census. The conclusions of this report led the Bush administration to back down on its decision.

As Chairman of the NACCS, I would ask that you provide as soon as possible an official report on the impact that the government's decision will have on the programs Statistics Canada administers for the benefit of Canadians.

In conclusion, I want to confirm to you that NACCS members strongly oppose the changes imposed by the government and urge you to do whatever may be in your power to have this ill-advised and unjustified decision reversed.

I thank you for the attention you will give to this letter.

Best regards



Alain Pineau

Chair of the National Advisory Committee on Cultural Statistics
National Director, Canadian Conference of the Arts

Cc The Hon. Tony Clement, Industry Minister
Rosemary Bender, Assistant Chief Statistician
Johanne Denis, Directrice Division de la démographie
Non-Governmental Members of the NACCS