

**PRESENTATION TO THE TASK FORCE ON ESTABLISHING THE
COMMISSION OF AFRICAN REGISTRARS GENERAL¹**

**BY MR. T T MUDENDE, THE REGISTRAR GENERAL OF ZIMBABWE,
17 OCTOBER 2017, VICTORIA FALLS, ZIMBABWE**

We are gathered here at a historic place for a historic moment. We are here to enhance or facilitate the visibility of civil registration systems in Africa. The problem of population data in Africa as a whole is not well documented. It is either absent or if it is available is scantily inadequate. Therefore decisions to address the Sustainable Development Goals and other national issues which are dependent on population data become compromised.

May we recall in 2010 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia the Ministers responsible for civil registration under the auspices of the African Union met for the first time to give political leadership to civil registration and to enhance regional commitment and partnership to improve civil registration coverage. We continue to rely on this pillar of political support. This positive gesture should continue to be nurtured to elevate civil registration systems to the expected standards.

On another note allow me to highlight my observations regarding a few vital resolutions made by the Conference of Ministers. These resolutions are critical to the advancement of civil registration systems. However, it appears no one is talking about them anymore. Maybe they are meant to be forgotten and gather dust on the shelf. Since these are resolutions of our Ministers they need to be taken up with the same resolute.

I ask you, who should be advancing the issue of civil registration? It is not a secret that this was not started by Registrars. The issue of civil registration is being championed by those in statistics. They are doing it for a noble cause. It is a statistical cause. Their concern is the collection of accurate population data for national planning. Our concern as Registrars is the establishment of impeccable all embracing civil registration systems to enable an easy route for those in statistics to collect that data. Hence our effort is on having everyone registered.

You may agree with me that before the data is handed over to statistics a lot of ground work would have been covered. What starts first is the setting up of systems and procedures to facilitate civil registration to take off then the collection of data. Civil registration is lagging behind.

¹ The views expressed in this report are that of the author and in no way reflect the position of the United Nations

This area cannot be neglected. It appears there is no one from civil registration to push our agenda or maybe this agenda is being misunderstood. This agenda is about ownership and control of these processes. It is about establishing our own civil registration systems and the creation, management and protection of our population database. This is the agenda for Registrars.

Our colleagues in the statistics agencies will be very happy to obtain pure unadulterated population and related data from civil registration using the latest electronic technologies. Our colleagues in statistics agencies meet regularly. In contrast the level of meetings in civil registration is generally low. We need to complement those in statistics. We cannot be a laughing stock. Sadly since 2010 to date there is a gap in establishing a body of Heads of Civil Registration Institutions to complement efforts being made to ensure that the agenda being advanced is the correct one.

We should be assisted by Resolution number 12 where the Conference of Ministers in 2010 said,

“Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) should consider establishing a substantive post on civil registration and vital statistics with appropriate support staff at the African Centre for Statistics, to ensure the sustainability of on-going efforts to improve CRVS systems in Africa.”

However no communication has been given whether the post has finally been established. If countries have challenges on civil registration they need a contact person to assist them at that level. That contact person must be knowledgeable about civil registration. Concern is on the time being taken to implement the Resolution.

Registrars need to be in a strong position to give advisory services. Let us take a look at Resolution number 14 where the Conference Ministers in 2010 said,

“Universities and national and regional statistical and demographic training institutions should develop appropriate curricula for building capacity and improving CRVS systems in Africa. The African Group on Statistical Training (AGROST) should consider putting CRVS on its agenda.”

Maybe when this Resolution was passed not much thought was applied to it. The issue here is that curriculum on civil registration must come from civil registration or with the consultation of Registrar Generals. The training institutions being vast and

divest are not specialists on civil registration. They have no hands on experience or background on civil registration systems. Civil registration is a specialised area.

My point is that there is need for a body of Registrar Generals to advocate and advise these training institutions what is to be included in the curriculum on civil registration. This cannot be decided by these institutions alone. The curriculum must be uniform and consistent with the expectations in civil registration. The graduates already employed in civil registration, are expected to apply their knowledge at work when they finish their studies yet we would not have contributed to the curriculum.

There are qualifications of certificates, diplomas and degrees in statistics and absolutely nothing on civil registration. We need a qualification of a Registrar. This area of civil registration is highly sensitive. It affects the security of a country. The management of a country's population database cannot be done by officials with various qualifications. It is an area that requires a professional approach.

We should be consistently reviewing civil registration systems to ensure that everything we do is within our mandate.

On Resolution number 26, the Conference Ministers in 2010 agreed that,

“Countries should work towards the establishment of integrated population registers/databases with the view of focusing initially on priority areas including the registration of births, deaths, marriages and divorces.”

When a Resolution is passed it must be observed in its entirety unless it is amended or cancelled. This resolution talk of establishing in countries integrated civil registration systems. This includes identity documents. In fact these events are linked in the population register through an identity number as a unifier.

Some development partners are targeting single events for them to participate in selective countries. This has the effect of splitting hairs unnecessarily. An integrated system is compact and comprehensive. It considers all the events. An unorganised approach by sponsors will result in chaos. Some events will receive more attention than others. There is a likelihood of over concentrating on one event by the sponsors at the expense of other events.

We need to develop country national action plans on civil registration. These should sell out which events require funding and those which do not. Presently there are movements that are concentrating in sponsoring identity documents only at the

expense of other vital events. There is need for a balance. This funding aspect must be provided for by the African governments.

It is very surprising that national identity documents are not being considered as a civil registration priority topic. They are not included in the country assessments as well. No explanation is given for this omission. We regard national identities as an important civil registration process. They are very much linked to the integrated population registers.

Already some countries are giving an identity number when a child is registered. That number becomes the child's identity number when the identity card is issued at a later stage. Thus, national identities do not exist in isolation of birth registration. They are the foundation of the vital civil registration system. That way it is easier to control and manage this topical issue.

My plea is for us to concentrate on solidifying all the civil registration and national identity documents into one integrated system. We need to guard against separating this even from the others. We also need to be careful about any such ad hoc programmes being put forward which impinge on the integration of the civil registration systems.

We also need to understand how these external programmes affect our database. This integrated system is our heart and soul. The whole identity component system have to be protected. They contain personal details of our people. They should not be accessed by outsiders. There are issues of confidentiality. Their maintenance and usage should be strictly monitored. Sponsors should not seek to have access to or influence us on the architecture and operations of the database. The onus is on Registrars to protect this national asset. We owe this to our people and governments.

At the second conference meeting of Ministers responsible for civil registration in 2012, Durban, South Africa the following Resolutions were also passed to enhance vital civil registration coverage:

On Resolution number 23 our Ministers said,

"African countries should ensure that an adequate pool of resources primarily from governments is allocated in order to fully achieve the objectives of the continent-wide programmes and on".

Resolution number 39 they said,

“African countries should allocate adequate resources as part of their recurrent national budget to ensure the credibility and sustainability of their CRVS systems”.

There is no mechanism in place to monitor the budgets for vital civil registration as espoused by the two resolutions. There is also no body corporate to follow up with countries on the adequacy of resources availed. These resolutions are critical to vital civil registration to address the low registrations being experienced. African governments should fund civil registration systems and not leave that area of funding to non-governmental organisations.

This area of funding civil registration systems does not require delegating to development partners. It is the State’s responsibility and it must be funded in full.

On Resolution number 29 the African Government Ministers agreed that,

“African Union Commission should establish a charter which enforces all African countries to register all events on civil registration”.

This Resolution is not being pursued or if it is then it is at a snail’s pace. This charter is necessary. It concerns our core business. The Charter should guide us. It will ensure that countries have a uniform approach to civil registration.

A lot of these and other resolutions have not been addressed. My appeal is for Registrar Generals to form an association to take up to another level the agenda of civil registration. We know our sector very well. It should be the responsibility of the association to play an advisory role and to follow up on all outstanding resolutions. The association should provide expert guidance to members. It should monitor developments in member countries and be a facilitator where necessary to improve civil registration systems.

Other professions have their associations to champion their visions. Lawyers have law societies. Engineers have theirs too, so do Accountants, Medical Doctors, Pilots, Farmers, Teachers and the list is endless. This is the time to have our own Registrar General’s association. It will also take care of the education, welfare and on the job training of its members.

I pray that you seriously consider this request. It is for our good. It is for the good of civil registration.

I THANK YOU

T.T. Mudede
Registrar General
Zimbabwe