

Media advisory: 2011 Census

July 21, 2010

OTTAWA – There has been considerable discussion in the media regarding the 2011 Census of Population.

There has also been commentary on the advice that Statistics Canada and I gave the government on this subject.

I cannot reveal and comment on this advice because this information is protected under the law. However, the government can make this information public if it so wishes.

I have always honoured my oath and responsibilities as a public servant as well as those specific to the Statistics Act.

I want to take this opportunity to comment on a technical statistical issue which has become the subject of media discussion. This relates to the question of whether a voluntary survey can become a substitute for a mandatory census.

It can not.

Under the circumstances, I have tendered my resignation to the Prime Minister.

I want to thank him for giving me the opportunity of serving him as the Chief Statistician of Canada, heading an agency that is a symbol of pride for our country.

To you, the men and women of Statistics Canada, thank you for giving me your full support and your dedication in serving Canadians. Without your contribution, day in and day out, in producing data of the highest quality, Canada would not have this institution that is our pride.

I also want to thank Canadians. We do remember, every single day, that it is because of you providing us with your information, we can function as a statistical agency. I am attaching an earlier message that I sent to Canadians in this regard.

In closing, I wish the best to my successor. I promise not to comment on how he/she should do the job. I do sincerely hope that my successor's professionalism will help run this great organization while defending its reputation.

Munir A. Sheikh

From Industry Minister Tony Clement:

I acknowledge with regret the resignation of Munir A. Sheikh, the Chief Statistician of Canada.

There has been considerable commentary about the federal government's decision to replace the 2011 mandatory census long form with the voluntary National Household Survey.

The Government took this decision because we do not believe Canadians should be forced, under threat of fines, jail, or both, to divulge extensive private and personal information. We believe it is not appropriate to compel citizens to divulge how many bedrooms they have in their houses, or what time they leave for work in the morning. The Government's approach is about finding a better balance between collecting necessary data and protecting the privacy rights of Canadians.

As I have noted previously, Statistics Canada's preferred approach would have been to maintain the mandatory long form census.

However, after the Government's decision to replace the mandatory long form census Statistics Canada was asked to provide options for conducting a voluntary survey of households. One of the options provided - the voluntary National Household Survey - was chosen.

A voluntary long form survey offers challenges that do not exist in the case of a census that uses coercion to compel completion. Nonetheless, by working together with the professionals at Statistics Canada I believe we can compensate for these challenges and offer data-users high quality and accurate information.

I have relied throughout this process on the frank and open advice of Statistics Canada and the Chief Statistician. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all employees of Statistics Canada for the hard work and dedication that has made Statistics Canada one of the best national statistical organizations in the world.

Until a permanent successor can be found Wayne Smith, Assistant Chief Statistician, Business and Trade Statistics, will act on an interim basis.