

Pacific Regional Workshop on Legal Identity and Identity Security

8-10th July, 2019

SPC Headquarters, Noumea, New Caledonia

SPC/BAG 2019/Session X.X–Background Paper 04

Session X.X: Global and Regional Commitments towards Universal Legal Identity; Progress and Plans

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

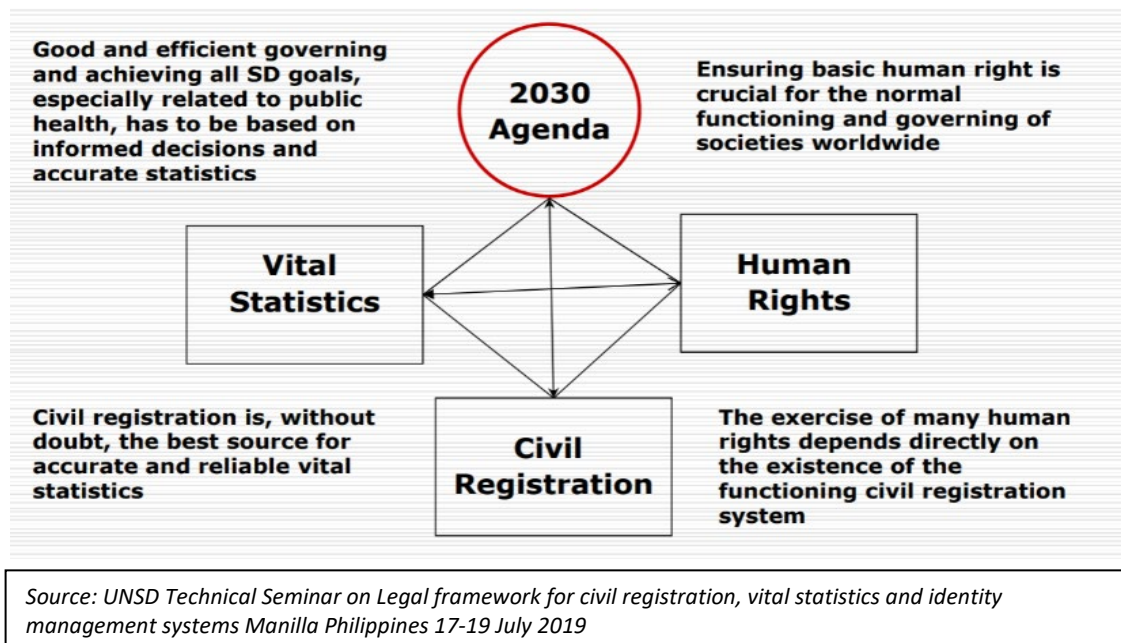
This paper provides a summary of the commitments made by Pacific Islands countries towards the development of civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems at a global and regional level, including commitments made within the health sector that rely on the achievement of well-functioning CRVS systems, most notably reporting under the Healthy Islands monitoring framework. The paper further provides a high-level summary of the progress made by Pacific Island countries against key goals of the Asia and Pacific regional action framework for CRVS and advances a recommendation that countries accelerate progress towards meeting the commitments set under these framework.

GLOBAL COMMITMENTS TOWARDS CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS

1. *Commitments towards the sustainable development agenda*: The importance and role of Civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems in human development is well recognised within the 2030 global agenda for sustainable development, which all Pacific countries have committed to, and proceeded to domesticate within national development frameworks. Legal identity is enlisted as a target 16.9 of goal 16 of the agenda; this target commits states towards achieving universal legal identity for all persons by 2030, including through birth registration. Goal 17.19 of the agenda further recognises civil registration systems as a fundamental infrastructure for measurement (through provision of data); within this goal, countries are called upon to achieve universal birth registration (i.e. 100% completeness in registration of births) and at least 80% completeness for death registration. Civil registration systems are needed to provide denominator data needed for measurement and monitoring of a majority of the goals and targets listed under the framework. Research confirms that at least 15 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 24 of the SDG targets require CRVS data (in particular numerators (births, deaths) and denominators (total population, live births, total deaths¹) for measurement of the indicators.
2. *Commitments towards different human and civil rights conventions*: Civil registration is further critical in facilitating (both directly and implicitly) the realisation of numerous United Nations Human and Civil rights conventions, which Pacific countries have signed up to. Birth registration facilitates the realisation of the right to own an identity, the right to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and, the right to know and be cared for by one's parents in accordance to Article 7 of the UN Convention on the Rights of

¹ <https://crvsgateway.info/CRVS-and-the-SDGs~531>

the Child². Birth registration further establishes the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law recognised under Article 24, of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The fulfilment of the right to be registered at birth is closely linked to the realization of many other human, civil and socioeconomic rights. Examples of these include the right to health and the right to education, the right to freedom of movement, the right to vote and to be elected etc., most of which are established on possession of a legal identity.



REGIONAL COMMITMENTS TOWARDS CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS

3. *Commitments towards the health Islands monitoring framework:* the health Islands monitoring framework is the umbrella policy, strategy and monitoring framework for health development in the Pacific region. The framework comprises of 48 mandatory health indicators that Pacific countries have agreed to routinely measure and report on. These indicators are separated into two main types: core (those that need to be updated annually) and complementary (those that need to be reported on as survey data is updated). In addition to the mandatory indicators, there are 31 optional indicators are proposed (to be selectively reported on, subject to national priorities and reporting systems). CRVS systems are a key source of data for monitoring against these indicators. An important feature of well-functioning CRVS systems is their ability to provide births, deaths and causes of death on a continuous basis, enabling a routine monitoring of the indicators as desired. In addition to the indicators that rely directly on data from the CRVS system, many more require accurate population data as a denominator. A reliable, well-functioning CRVS system allows countries to update this data more accurately between censuses, ensuring the best possible data for planning and evaluation
4. *Commitments towards the Asia and Pacific Decade for civil registration and vital statistics and the regional Action framework:* The majority of countries in Asia and the Pacific do not have universal and responsive CRVS systems that meet relevant international standards. Recognising this, and the need and importance of well-functioning CRVS systems, Pacific countries have along with other countries in the Asia region committed to the Asian and Pacific CRVS Decade (2015-2024), an initiative aimed at focussing improvements of national CRVS systems in both regions. The CRVS Decade was proclaimed at the Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) in Asia and the Pacific, held November 2014 in Bangkok, Thailand. Through the declaration of the CRVS Decade, governments gave a timeframe of 2015-2024 for all people in Asia and the Pacific to benefit from universal and responsive CRVS systems facilitating the realization of their rights and supporting good governance, health and

² Right to own identity The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire nationality and, as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents. – Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

development. During the 2014 Ministerial Conference, Governments also adopted the Ministerial Declaration to “Get Every One in the Picture” in Asia and the Pacific and a regional action framework which outlines three key goals for the region as follows:

- A. Universal civil registration of births, deaths and other vital events;
- B. Provision to all individuals of legal documentation of civil registration of births, deaths and other vital events, as necessary, in order to claim identity, civil status and ensuing rights;
- C. Production and dissemination of accurate, complete and timely vital statistics based on registration records.

PROGRESS MADE BY PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES AGAINST SELECTED TARGETS OF THE REGIONAL ACTION FRAMEWORK

In order to support governments in the monitoring of progress against the above commitments, countries agreed to collate and report to UNESCAP baseline information on the status of their CRVS systems in 2015, and to re-valuate progress in the mid of the decade i.e. in 2020. The following section provides information on the progress made by Pacific countries against selected targets of the regional action framework. Table 1 provides a summary of progress made by countries against key implementation steps that were agreed upon in 2014.

Table 1. Status of progress against key implementation steps

Countries	National coordination mechanism	Comprehensive assessment	National targets	National strategy	National focal point	Reporting to ESCAP
American Samoa	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cook Islands	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
Fiji	Yes	Yes	Yes	Plans	Yes	Yes
French Polynesia						
Guam					Yes	
Kiribati	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Marshall Islands		Yes				
Micronesia (FSM)	Yes	Yes	Partial	Plans		Yes
Nauru	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
New Caledonia						
Niue	Plans	Yes		Yes		
Northern Mariana Islands	Plans	Yes				
Palau	Plans	Yes			Yes	
Papua New Guinea			Partial	Plans	Yes	Yes
Samoa	Yes	Yes	Partial	Yes	Yes	Yes
Solomon Islands	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tonga	Yes	Plans	Yes	Plans	Yes	Yes
Tuvalu		Yes		Yes		
Vanuatu	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	
	Status unknown					

Since the beginning of the CRVS Decade in 2015, several Pacific have created national CRVS coordination mechanisms or developed national strategies to strengthen their CRVS systems. In addition, some countries have published vital statistics reports based on registration records. These activities show the growing importance of CRVS for Pacific countries. However, to ensure they translate into leading to tangible improvements of CRVS systems, it is also necessary to monitor the progress made. For this reason, the midterm questionnaire of the CRVS Decade was recently sent to all Pacific countries. As countries will need time to formally report on their progress in the implementation of the Regional Action Framework, this section is using data available elsewhere to assess progress of Pacific countries against selected targets of the Regional Action Framework. Focus was given to targets relevant to legal identity and representative of the three goals of the Regional Action Framework.

The use of different sources with potential different methodologies raises the issue of comparability, and therefore the figures available in the tables below should be seen more as indications of trends rather than clear measures of progress. It is also important to note that only ten Pacific countries submitted a baseline report at the beginning of the Decade, and therefore half of them do not have neither baselines nor targets for 2024. However, using data available elsewhere, one can compare them to countries with baselines and targets.

Target 1A: Percentage of births registered (completeness rate)

The first target of the Regional Action Framework (Target 1A) pertains to the registration of births. Birth registration is a human right, as enshrined in the Convention for the Rights of Child (CRC). Registering children at birth is the first step in securing their recognition before the law, safeguarding their rights, and ensuring that any violation of these rights does not go unnoticed. Children without official identification documents may be denied health care or education. Later in life, the lack of such documentation can mean that a child may enter into marriage or the labour market, or be conscripted into the armed forces, before the legal age. In adulthood, birth certificates may be required to obtain social assistance or a job in the formal sector, to buy or prove the right to inherit property, to vote and to obtain a passport³. Birth registration should be the entry point of identity management system. The target measures the percentage of births registered within the legally stipulated time period, maximum one year, also called birth registration completeness. The threshold of 90% is particularly important, since with birth registration completeness above 90%, data can be considered complete and do not require adjustments before the compilation of statistics.

The situation in the Pacific at the beginning of the Decade was rather heterogeneous, with birth registration completeness going from 20% in Samoa to 100% in Cook Islands. However, if all countries manage to reach their targets by the end of the Decade, few countries should have a birth registration completeness below 85% in 2024. This is explained by the fact that most countries that did not submit a baseline report already have a birth registration completeness above 85%. Though data availability is limited and more than one sources is used, a positive trend can be seen in countries such as Fiji. Moreover, many countries with a target for 2024 have already achieved their objective while the others seem to be on track.

³ <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/birth-registration/>

Table 2. Target 1A: Percentage of births registered (completeness rate)

Note that a close evaluation of the data provided in 2017 indicates some data quality issues in the reporting done by some of the countries

Countries	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	PCRN, 2017 ^a	Target 2024
American Samoa					75%				100%	100%
Cook Islands					100%	>90%			100%	100%
Fiji						42%		71%	62%	85%
French Polynesia						>90%				
Guam								>90%		
Kiribati	97%		85%						91%	100%
Marshall Islands										
Micronesia (F.S.)					80%					95%
Nauru				>90%					90%	
New Caledonia								>90%		
Niue			100%	100%	100%	100%	100%		100%	
Northern Mariana Islands					<90%				98%	
Palau								>90%		
Papua New Guinea										90%
Samoa		20%					<90%		65%	85%
Solomon Islands					29%				42%	85%
Tonga					89%				96%	95%
Tuvalu										
Vanuatu										

	Baseline reports, % of births registered within the legally stipulated time period
	National Vital Statistics Reports
	United Nations Statistics Division, Population and Vital Statistics Report
	Status unknown

^a Figures reported by countries at the Disaster Preparation and Response Workshop of the Pacific Civil Registrars Network, October 2017. Note that a close evaluation of the data provided at this workshop indicates some data quality issues in some of the country reporting.

Target 1D: Per cent of deaths registered (completeness rate)

The second key target of the Regional Action Framework is the percentage of deaths registered, or death registration completeness. Death registration enables proof of death and the provision of legal rights to the family. In many countries of the Asia-Pacific region, a sizeable proportion of deaths occur without the involvement of actors from the health system, making registration a challenge. Establishing a well-functioning CRVS system guaranteeing that all deaths are registered enables countries to make population projections for updating population registers and for monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). When talking about identity management, death registration should be seen as the exit point of the system.

Table 3. Target 1D: Per cent of deaths registered (completeness rate)

Note that a close evaluation of the data provided in 2017 indicates some data quality issues in the reporting done by some of the countries

Countries	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	PCRN, 2017 ^a	Target 2024
American Samoa					90%				100%	100%
Cook Islands					100%	>90%			100%	100%
Fiji					59%		88%		100%	100%
French Polynesia						>90%				
Guam								>90%		
Kiribati	91%	<90%	75%						75%	100%
Marshall Islands										
Micronesia (F.S.)					98%					90%
Nauru				>90%					95% ¹	
New Caledonia							>90%			
Niue		>90%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%		100% ²	
Northern Mariana Islands					<90%				100%	
Palau								>90%		
Papua New Guinea										25%
Samoa							<90%		88%	70%
Solomon Islands									12%	60%
Tonga					80%				58%	85%
Tuvalu									100%	
Vanuatu										

	Baseline reports, % of deaths registered in a given year
	National Vital Statistics Reports
	United Nations Statistics Division, Population and Vital Statistics Report
	Status unknown

^a Figures reported by countries at the Disaster Preparation and Response Workshop of the Pacific Civil Registrars Network, October 2017

¹ Does not include non-citizen

² Burials are only permitted with death certificate

³ Combining civil registration and health database

As for birth registration, the 90% threshold means the data is complete and do not require adjustment for statistics to be compiled. Half of the countries in the region have already reached this threshold, and others are very close to it. However, some countries will need to go well above their 2024 target to have complete data. Though low death registration completeness has an incidence on the production of vital statistics, its most notable effect is that it prevents countries to use death registration records as the exit point of any potential identity management system.

Target 1E: Per cent of deaths recorded by the health sector with a medically certified cause of death recorded using the international form of the death certificate

In addition to registering deaths, it is of utmost importance to assign them a medically certified cause of death. Target 1E of the Regional Action Framework relates to those deaths that occur within health facilities, or where the health sector is involved in certifying the death. High-quality mortality data requires that all deaths are medically certified using the international form of death certificate, as it involves identification of the cause of death. Together with adequate training and processes, medical certification facilitates the correct coding of the underlying cause of death using the *International Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems*, currently in its tenth revision (ICD-10).

Though the below table shows some countries are assigning a medically certified cause of death to all deaths recorded by the health sector, some countries are still lagging behind. Due to the lack of data availability, issuing a strong statement is difficult. However, for countries with data such as Cook Islands, Kiribati, and Solomon Islands, an improvement can be seen. If the pace is maintained until the end of the Decade, these countries should reach their target by 2024 or before.

Table 4. Target 1E: Per cent of deaths recorded by the health sector with a medically certified cause of death recorded using the international form of the death certificate

Note that a close evaluation of the data provided in 2017 indicates some data quality issues in the reporting done by some of the countries

Countries	Baseline 2014	PCRN, 2017 ^a	Target 2024
American Samoa	100%	100%	100%
Cook Islands	78%	100%	100%
Fiji	99%	100%	100%
French Polynesia			
Guam			
Kiribati	16% ¹	75%	80%
Marshall Islands			
Micronesia (F.S.)	98%		100%
Nauru		97%	
New Caledonia			
Niue		100%	
Northern Mariana Islands		100%	
Palau			
Papua New Guinea			
Samoa		70%	95%
Solomon Islands	16%	50%	80%
Tonga		100%	NA
Tuvalu		85%	
Vanuatu			

^a Figures reported by countries at the Disaster Preparation and Response Workshop of the Pacific Civil Registrars Network, October 2017

1. Death outside health facilities and also death from public health facilities (outer islands) do not use International form of the death certificate.

Target 2A: Per cent of births registered accompanied with the issuance of an official birth certificate

The issuance of an official birth certificate is a distinct activity that should follow the registration of a birth, as it serves as proof of identity. The fundamental purpose is for furnishing or establishing legal instruments of direct interest to individuals: the issuance of an official birth certificate allows an individual to prove the facts relating to his/her existence, identity, personal and family situation. The continuous and permanent

nature of these official documents allows them to be used as evidence in legal proceedings, to meet administrative requirements (e.g. proving identity to obtain a passport) and other purposes such as accessing immunization or education. For these reasons, target 2A of the Regional Action Framework focuses on the issuance of birth certificates with minimum information.

Table 5. Target 2A: Per cent of births registered accompanied with the issuance of an official birth certificate

Note that a close evaluation of the data provided in 2017 indicates some data quality issues in the reporting done by some of the countries

Countries	Baseline, 2015 ^a	PCRN, 2017 ^b	Target 2024
American Samoa		100%	95%
Cook Islands	100%	100%	100%
Fiji	100%	<100%	100%
French Polynesia			
Guam			
Kiribati	100%	100%	100%
Marshall Islands			
Micronesia (F.S.)	90%		
Nauru		<100%	
New Caledonia			
Niue		100%	
Northern Mariana Islands			
Palau			
Papua New Guinea			50%
Samoa	30%	100%	85%
Solomon Islands	49%	<100%	70%
Tonga		100%	95%
Tuvalu		<100%	
Vanuatu			

^a Figures reported by countries in their baseline report in 2015

^b Figures reported by countries at the Disaster Preparation and Response Workshop of the Pacific Civil Registrars Network, October 2017

Ideally, all birth registrations should be accompanied with the issuance of an official birth certificate⁴. However, the implementation of a fee for issuing certificates can act as a barrier to the access to birth certificates. As per the data reported by countries during a meeting of the Pacific Civil Registrars Network in 2017, most countries are issuing certificates for all registered births, which means some countries have already achieved their 2024 target.

Target 3H: Vital statistics report for the previous two years, using registration records as the primary source, is made available in the public domain

Goal 3 of the Regional Action Framework highlights the critical importance of civil registration being linked to the production and quality assurance of vital statistics on the occurrence and characteristics of vital events. For many Governments, the routine generation of accurate, complete and timely statistics on births, deaths and causes of death will require medium-term strategic and prioritized investment to improve civil registration and the national statistical system. Ultimately, these statistics should be published in a vital statistics report with detailed explanations on the data and the assumptions made to allow the user to

⁴ WHO. 2012. *Strengthening civil registration and vital statistics for births, deaths and causes of death: Resource Kit*

achieve a better understanding of the findings and data limitations, which is crucial when designing policies⁵. For this reason, countries should aim at regularly disseminating vital statistics reports.

Table 6. Target 3H: Vital statistics report for the previous two years, using registration records as the primary source, is made available in the public domain

Countries	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Target
American Samoa						Achieved
Cook Islands						Achieved
Fiji						Achieved
French Polynesia						
Guam						
Kiribati						Achieved
Marshall Islands						
Micronesia (F.S.)						2024
Nauru						Achieved
New Caledonia						
Niue						Achieved
Northern Mariana Islands						
Palau						
Papua New Guinea						2024
Samoa						2019
Solomon Islands						2025
Tonga						2017
Tuvalu						Achieved
Vanuatu						Achieved

	Report published
	Report soon to be published

A strong push for the production of vital statistics was recently seen in the Pacific. As a result, many countries published their first report or are drafting it. One can therefore assume most Pacific countries will be able to publish a report by the end of the Decade in 2024. Though the use of civil registration records for vital statistics is not the main output but a by-product of a civil registration system, the availability of data for statistics acts a proof of a well-functioning civil registration system.

In conclusion, the few data currently available shows that most Pacific countries are on track to reach the above targets by 2024. Moreover, it seems countries which didn't set targets are progressing too. This is a particularly positive outcome, as it shows the whole region is moving toward the same direction. However, because of various levels of CRVS development at the beginning of the Decade in 2015, some countries will still lag behind the others in 2024 even if they achieve their targets. Hopefully, with the more detailed assessment provided with the midterm questionnaire, specific areas needing renewed focus will be identified and subsequently addressed in these countries to make sure they are not left behind.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Civil registration officials of Pacific Island countries are requested to make consideration of the following recommendations:

1. To continue improving CRVS systems by ensuring at least 90% of births and deaths are registered within the legally stipulated time period, thus allowing for the use of civil registration as a basis for identity management systems and the production of vital statistics.

⁵ <https://www.unescap.org/resources/regional-action-framework-civil-registration-and-vital-statistics-asia-and-pacific>

2. Strengthen their collaboration with the health sector to underline the importance of recording medically certified causes of death.
3. Ensure no or low fees for the provision of legal documentation of civil registration so that all individuals can be provided with it.
4. Take advantage of the recent progress in the completeness of civil registration data to promote their use for the production of vital statistics.

REFERENCES

United Nations, 2014. “Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System.” Statistical Papers, Series M No. 19/Rev.3. New York, NY: UN. Available at: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/Demographic/standmeth/principles/M19Rev3en.pdf>.

APPENDIX



Ministerial Declaration

to “Get every one in the picture” in Asia and the Pacific^{*}

We, the ministers and representatives of members and associate members of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific assembled at the Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, held in Bangkok, from 24 to 28 November 2014,

Reaffirming the human right of everyone to be recognized everywhere as a person before the law, which is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,¹

Recalling the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,² the Convention on the Rights of the Child,³ the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families,⁴ and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,⁵ which stipulate that States Parties should register all children immediately after birth without discrimination, as invoked by resolutions adopted by the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, the most recent being General Assembly resolution 66/141 of 19 December 2011, and Human Rights Council resolution 22/7 of 21 March 2013,

Also recalling the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages,⁶ which stipulates that States Parties should ensure that all marriages are registered in an appropriate official register by the competent authority,

Further recalling General Assembly resolution 68/261 of 29 January 2014, which endorsed the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, and General Assembly resolution 64/267 of 3 June 2010, which acknowledged that reliable and timely statistics and indicators measuring a country's progress are an indispensable basis for informed policy decision-making and for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals at the national, regional and international levels, on the understanding that this extends to other internationally agreed development goals and to monitoring at the subnational level,

Recalling World Health Assembly resolution WHA67.14 of 24 May 2014, in which member States were urged, in the context of the development agenda beyond 2015, to recognize the importance of accountability by strengthening of civil registration and vital statistics and health information systems, which can be used for monitoring health equity by providing disaggregated data that do not reveal information about individuals,

^{*} Adopted by the Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and Pacific on 28 November 2014 in Bangkok, Thailand.

¹ General Assembly resolution 217 A (III).

² See General Assembly resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex.

³ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1577, No. 27531.

⁴ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 2220, No. 39481.

⁵ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 2515, No. 44910.

⁶ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 521, No. 7525.