



ISI/IAOS INTERVENTIONS ON ETHICAL ISSUES

**Discussion Paper Prepared for the forthcoming IAOS General Assembly
at the World Statistics Congress
23 August 2011 in Dublin, Ireland**

Background

The discussion on how to react to different cases where the ISI Declaration on Professional Ethics seemed to be violated has a long history. The 2010 discussion in the ISI/IAOS community was mainly focused on whether and how these bodies should intervene when the integrity of official statistics in specific countries was questioned, although it is possible that such issues might arise with respect to other types of organizations. The ISI intervened in some cases but not the IAOS. In each case, the IAOS felt that information on the real situation in the countries was lacking. Earlier, the issue had been occasionally discussed at some meetings and then systematically addressed in 1999 with the Malaguerra Report.

The IAOS Executive Committee at its meeting on 22 October 2010 set up a small group (consisting of Stephen Penneck, Irena Krizman and Nancy Gordon) to prepare a short report for discussion at the Dublin IAOS General Assembly on the circumstances in which (and how) the IAOS might intervene when the ISI Declaration was not respected. It is also important to stress that all the activities would have to be done with close cooperation between the ISI and the IAOS.

The Malaguerra Report

The IAOS Review Committee chaired by Carlo Malaguerra previously reviewed this issue in 1999. That report considered integrity and professional ethics as part of a wider agenda looking at the role of the IAOS. The Malaguerra Report gave a fairly full consideration of this matter (pages 13 to 15). In summary, the 1999 review noted that the IAOS is in a good position to monitor the implementation of ethical principles, given our worldwide coverage and the fact that almost all countries sign up to the ISI Declaration and the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

A preliminary version of the report stated that the ISI family at large should provide active defence of the professional autonomy of statisticians, and that the IAOS has a role to monitor and report on particular situations where integrity is endangered. Further, implementation should be in close connection with the ISI whose accreditation to the UN would strengthen its capacity to address such issues. However, the report on the consultation on the preliminary report shows that the views of members were clearly divided on this issue. A minority felt that the IAOS had no role at all to play in these matters. The majority thought that there was a role, but they differed on how it should be taken forward.

The final report recommended that the IAOS:

1. Acknowledge as an 'agreed policy' of the IAOS, the promotion of good practices as a major criterion in setting up programmes of meetings;
2. Modify the Statutes of the IAOS, with the introduction of the following sentence: "the promotion and defence of professional ethics and the integrity of official statistics are inherent parts of the mission of the IAOS";



3. Encourage analytical work and presentation of case studies on the status of integrity and ethics, within the framework of IAOS conferences and meetings, as well as the development of monitoring and reporting services to be established and carried out on a voluntary basis;
4. Express its official support for the proposal to create an ISI Committee on Professional Ethics, which was on the agenda of the ISI Council meeting to be held in August 1999; and
5. Request the ISI Council to establish a task force including the Executive Committee of the IAOS to set up mechanisms and procedures for intervention in cases when the integrity of official statistics is endangered.

Progress against the Malaguerra recommendations

The Malaguerra Report was discussed at the IAOS General Assembly held in Helsinki on 16 August 1999. The IAOS was asked by the General Assembly to take account of the recommendations in future work. During the ISI Berlin session in 2003, a meeting was held on "Revitalising the IAOS," which agreed to a series of statements about the role of the IAOS. These included: IAOS' role is to promote and support the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, such as the integrity of official statistics, but no specific action was taken.

Since then, some progress has been made, which is set out below against the original five recommendations.

1. The IAOS has held sessions promoting good practice. As a part of a new programme, the IAOS Executive Committee 2009-2011 decided to organise a regional workshop on governance and sustainability of modern statistical systems to exchange information about good practices. This Governance Workshop in Santiago, Chile in October 2010 followed a similar one in South Africa in 2009 that was supported by the IAOS. It is likely that the IAOS will continue to support regional governance workshops at the time of IAOS conferences, the next being in Kiev in 2012. More generally, IAOS sessions at the ISI have supported capacity building, sharing best practices, and supporting users.
2. Amending our Statutes, as proposed by the Malaguerra Report, has not occurred. However, the IAOS has been active in this field. For example, the recent edition of the IAOS Journal was dedicated to professional ethics.
3. The IAOS Executive Committee is not aware of any case studies being reported to the ISI/IAOS meetings or of any voluntary monitoring or reporting. During the IAOS Conference in Chile in 2010, however, a special session was dedicated to presenting the revised ISI Declaration.
4. The ISI Committee on Professional Ethics was set up and the ISI Declaration was updated. That committee was dissolved in 2010.
5. The task force referred to will be set up by the ISI, and the IAOS will be asked to provide a member.



The way forward?

The IAOS Executive Committee thinks we need to understand the reasons that the recommendations of the Malaguerra Report – especially the second and third ones – have not been fully taken forward. Regarding the second recommendation, it seems that the IAOS can continue with activities that promote and defend professional ethics and the integrity of official statistics through the Journal and the regional governance workshops, as well as in other venues. Doing so does not require modifying our statutes.

Besides that, it might be useful to consider whether the ISI/IAOS should set up a Web site to offer a platform where all those who think that the ISI Declaration was violated can report. Through such a site, the ISI/IAOS might possibly get more accurate information from the countries and could also monitor the cases.

Such a proposal raises several issues that would have to be resolved, however. First, the editor's role would have to be considered. Would it be limited to the usual moderator role of ensuring that contributions are not libellous (perhaps not a trivial job!), or would it be more active?

Second, would the Web site be used to promote an online debate on each issue – that is, would any concern received about an incident be put on the page and comments invited from ISI/IAOS members? Would comments and further contributions also be published? Under this proposal, the role of the ISI/IAOS would not be to form a view on these cases. It would be to provide a platform for discussion and a log of possible incidents.

Third, would the ISI ask one of its committees to monitor the content of the site in order to make recommendations to the ISI Council when the committee felt that action was warranted? For example, in the case of concern about an official statistics agency, the ISI might ask that an independent group be allowed to visit and learn about the agency's procedures for producing the estimates in question.

Finally, would the Web site be public, or restricted to ISI/IAOS members?

References:

Final report on the review of the profile, mission and tasks of the International Association for Official Statistics (THE MALAGUERRA REPORT)
http://isi.cbs.nl/iaos/aboutus/iaos_profile_mission_tasks.pdf

ISI Declaration on Professional Ethics, 2010
<http://isi-web.org/about/declarationprofessionalethics-2010uk/all-pages>

UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics
<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/dnss/gp/fundprinciples.aspx>