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*The Academies of Arts, Humanities and Sciences of Canada  
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July 15, 2010

The Honourable Tony Clement  
Minister of Industry  
235 Queen Street  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0H5

**Re: 2011 Long-Form Census**

Dear Minister Clement,

I write on behalf of the Council of the Royal Society of Canada, which has asked me to convey its concern about the proposed cancellation of the mandatory long-form census for 2011. As Canada's National Academy, the Royal Society aims to avoid taking positions on political questions, but rather focuses on promoting the creation and diffusion of knowledge. This is our core mission and the reason I am writing today.

We are convinced that the long-form census is a key element in maintaining the conditions propitious for credible social research. Moreover, in a knowledge-based economy, reliable information is essential for evidence-based public-policy making.

Others individuals and organizations will have written with substantive information about the importance of the long-form census to their work, and the inadequacy of a voluntary questionnaire for research purposes. We should like to address the question of privacy.

The privacy regime applicable to Statistics Canada, as carefully elaborated in sections 17 and 34 of the *Statistics Act*, is among the most highly regarded in the world. The Privacy Commissioner has stated that almost no complaints about the census have been received. Your office indicates, however, that many Canadians have expressed concern about privacy issues. The very manner in which this discussion about privacy has been framed reveals the importance of good social research to public policy-making. For example, it is unclear that those who have written to you (or failed to write to the Privacy Commissioner) are expressing views about the protection of data collected in the census. It may be that their objection is rather to what they perceive to be an "intrusive, big-brother State". Without accurate information about the real nature of the concerns being expressed, about

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how widespread these concerns are, and about whether the cancellation of the mandatory long form census addresses these concerns, it is difficult to formulate an appropriate policy response.

You have already heard from the research community, business and labour groups and think tanks about the impact of this decision on their capacity to undertake comparative and longitudinal research. You might ask the same question of them: “Show us the specific detail of your apprehension.” This is entirely legitimate. Just as it is important to gauge the true nature and extent of public concern about the long-form questionnaire, it is important to obtain accurate data from those who see negative consequences of the cancellation.

The proposal to cancel the mandatory long-form census represents a major change in direction for the census and is at odds with the manner in which censuses are conducted in other G8 countries. It is clearly within the mandate of the government to take such decisions. Nonetheless, as the country’s National Academy, we wish to convey our position that decisions of this magnitude and importance should not be taken without a full public airing of the competing policies at issue and a careful and statistically credible inquiry into the actual extent of the privacy concerns being expressed by those who seek cancellation of the mandatory long-form census.

Good public policy depends on good data. We invite you to solicit that data before taking a final decision. We would be pleased to collect information from Fellows of the Royal Society of Canada engaged in social research using census data and forward this to your office. We would also be pleased to prepare a brief for any Parliamentary or other committee that might hold hearings on the matter.

We very much hope that you will undertake a broad public consultation prior to taking a decision with such consequences for those who rely on census data for both research and policy-making purposes.

Yours sincerely,



Roderick A. Macdonald, FRSC  
President