GENEVA ¦ **15 February 2013** -- Global leaders in **health statistics** gathered in Geneva this week to discuss future possibilities of **collaboration to improve current practices in health estimates**.

At a meeting hosted by the World Health Organization (WHO), representatives from WHO, the United Nations Population Division and other UN agencies, the World Bank, development foundations, academic institutions and scientific journals committed to working together more closely for better calculation, sharing and communication of estimates of health indicators.

Participants agreed unanimously on the need for increased investment in data collection, particularly on deaths and their causes.

“More than 100 countries do not have a system that registers births and deaths, and only 34 countries – representing just 15% of the world’s population – produce quality cause-of-death data,” says Dr Ties Boerma, director of Health Statistics and Information Systems at WHO. “Accurate health data are critical for a better understanding of the health situation and to determine where we need to focus attention and resources.”

Where there are no accurate data, statistical modelling is used to predict levels and trends, sometimes with large uncertainty.

In an effort to provide the world with the best possible, comparable global health statistics, participants agreed to work together under four key proposals:

1. regular, more formalized interaction between United Nations agencies and academic groups from around the world working on global health estimates;

2. call for increased investment in country health information systems to reduce reliance on statistical models, and inclusion of a target in the post-2015 development agenda for civil registration and vital statistics systems;

3. greater investment in training and tools to enhance the capacity to produce, interpret and use estimates in developing countries; and

4. better sharing of data and methods of estimation among scientists, as well as better communication of data to policymakers and the general public.

"Health data should be made more accessible and easier to use through simple messages and effective visualizations," says professor Hans Rosling, co-chair of this week's Global Health Estimates meeting and founder of Gapminder Foundation.

"We must avoid statisticians just talking to themselves. A lot of people are interested in this information but they should not have to be advanced statisticians to understand and use it."

WHO is committed to working closely with developing countries to improve their health information systems including birth and death registration. A follow-up meeting is planned in April to work on best practices for calculating estimates on disease and disability. WHO will continue to work closely with external experts to provide the best possible estimates of global health.