



UNITED NATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION

**UN Expert Group Meeting on
Measuring International Migration: Concepts and Methods
New York, 4 – 7 December 2006**

Opening Statement

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Dear colleagues:

It is a pleasure to welcome you to this Expert Group meeting, and for those visiting, welcome to New York.

National and international statistical communities have long collected international migration data. One of the main sources of statistics on migrant stock is the population census, but this is available at long intervals. There is a possibility to use censuses to estimate migration flow but again because of the long interval between censuses they can not provide regular and timely statistics on migrant flow. Most countries have some systems of administrative records that can be and are tapped, but for many countries these data are not readily available for statistical use. Thus, we are still finding that countries are not able to track migration effectively. Due to differences in definitions and methods used, statistics are not comparable across and within countries.

The United Nations Statistics Division has, on its part, supported this work by issuing recommendations on concepts and methods. The latest revision of the set of *Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration, Revision I* was issued 1998, which the recommendations issued in 1976. The recommendations are however yet to be widely adopted.

Meanwhile there have been significant changes in migration patterns worldwide, that affect how international migration is being defined and measured. International migration is a growing phenomenon, both in scope and complexity.¹ The types of migration flows are more varied; the magnitude and frequency of movements of persons between countries have increased; and characteristics and categories of migrants have expanded. These changes have statistical implications; and according to High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, there is need for practical,

¹Summary of the High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, (convened by the Secretary-General in September 2006); A/61/515, para. 7.

evidence-based measures to enhance the benefits of migration and minimize its negative effects.²

As a first step to responding to this emerging need, the Statistics Division is conducting a review of national practices in the measurement of international migration. The review will serve as a basis for revising the recommendations and supporting the development of migration statistics. The papers you have submitted for the meeting and discussions on them will be inputs for updating the concepts and documenting methods used in collecting migration data.

It is expected that this expert group meeting will:

- (i) Identify aspects of the definitions and categorization of migrants reflected in the *Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration*, that need further specification and refining.
- (ii) Determine effective ways for exploiting different sources of data to obtain estimates of migrant flows and stock, based on lessons from countries on successes in the use of various methods.
- (iii) Suggest a way of extending to other regions, and internationally, the use of immigration data of receiving countries to estimate emigration.

On concepts and definitions used in international migration statistics, it will be necessary for the group to indicate what aspects of the current definitions are problematic. Specific changes to make them relevant and more widely applicable should be proposed. In this context, you would also consider other categories of migrants that countries are interested in measuring and the feasibility of collecting data on them.

On the issue of measurement, the meeting should distinguish among the national practices that are to be discussed, according to how well they can capture the concepts. It would also be necessary to identify for each source of data, countries whose measurement

²); A/61/515, para. 21.

approach can be cited as good examples in measurement on inflows, outflows and stock of migrants.

The measurement of emigration has its unique set of challenges and deserves special focus, as provided for on the work programme. Country practices and lessons from the regular national sources should be reviewed; the potentials offered by other countries' immigration data should be critically examined; and proposals made as to how other countries could be interested in participating in data exchange.

Finally, the meeting should identify major activities needed to improve the adequacy and availability of international migration statistics and ways to assist countries in this area of work.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank you for accepting to be part of this expert group and for the contribution I know you will be making in this review.