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DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION

Statement on Programme Issues by Mr. Paul Cheung, Director of the United Nations Statistics Division to the 40th Session of the Statistical Commission
New York, 27 February 2009

Agenda item 5: Programme Questions

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Mr. Chairperson,
Distinguished Delegates and Colleagues,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to present to you at this point the work programme of the UN Statistics Division for the current year and the near future. Before doing so, I would like to make a few remarks regarding the conduct of the 40th session of the UN Statistical Commission.

Programme aspects related to the Statistical Commission

I am happy to report that a total of 140 countries represented by their national statistical offices and 42 international agencies participated in the 40th session of the Commission and its many side events. I would like to put on record my appreciation to all national statistical offices and international agencies that have helped in the preparation of the various events. Special thanks go to the organizers, chairpersons and speakers at the Innovation Seminar, the High-Level Forum on Official Statistics, and other seminars during these 10 days. Special thanks should also go to the Asia Pacific countries that have provided publicity material for the exhibition, which was an overwhelming success. I am also thankful for the facilitation provided by France, United Kingdom, Paris21, ECOWAS Secretariat, the World Bank and UNFPA to some countries for their participation.

This Commission has considered 24 substantive papers, of which 13 were for discussion and 11 for information. The papers were posted on the web on time in all languages. The feedback I received was that the Commission is satisfied with the current methods of work, the documentation of the papers, and the split between discussion and information papers. This is the second year that we have considered all information papers as a block. This arrangement has worked well. The secretariat will work with the Bureau to further review the methods of work and make appropriate changes if necessary, especially in the direction of an even greater focus on the emerging issues.

This Commission also celebrates the completion of a process to re-institute inter-governmental bodies on Statistics in all regional commissions. This process took several years to complete, and on February 4, the last of the inter-governmental entities, the ESCAP Committee on Statistics met at its first resumed session. At this Commission, all the Chairpersons from these inter-governmental regional entities were present. A special meeting was held earlier this week to discuss modalities of cooperation among these entities and a better linkage with the work of the Statistical Commission. I would like to

mention the chairpersons by name: Pali Lehohla of South Africa is the chair of the Statistical Commission for Africa; Rusman Heriawan of Indonesia is the chair of the Committee on Statistics of ESCAP, Heli Jeskanen-Sundstrom of Finland is the chair of Conference of the European Statisticians, Hector Maldonado of Columbia is the chair of the Statistical Conference of the Americas, and finally, Mr. Yasin El-haj Abdeen of Sudan is the chair of the Committee on Statistics of ESCWA.

Programme aspects related to the work of the United Nations Statistics Division

Let me now turn more specifically to the work programme of the UN Statistics Division (UNSD).

World Statistics Day

In 2008, I wrote to all countries asking if they celebrate any national day or month on statistics or conduct commemorative events. The replies were overwhelming; some 100 countries reported back that they either celebrate a regular national event on statistics or have special occasions to celebrate their achievements. The listing by country and event is available on the UNSD website. Subsequently, I wrote and asked for views on whether we should hold special observance for a World Statistics Day in 2010. Again, the replies were overwhelmingly positive. In my letter, I mentioned that we could focus on three sub-themes: service to the nation and the world, professionalism, and integrity. Over 65 countries and international agencies have replied to voice their support. I firmly believe that the time has come for us to declare a special day to celebrate all the achievements of official statistics. In this regard, UNSD will work with the member states to put forward a resolution to the 41st session of the Statistical Commission to officially endorse this event.

Working with Countries

In 2009 UNSD will continue its focus on working with countries on the compilation of basic statistics with the help of the regional commissions and international agencies. In 2008, we organized 35 events and serviced close to 2000 participants from more than 150 countries or territories. We provided funding for close to 500 participants from the developing countries.

Our programmes on the MDGs, gender statistics and Population and Housing Censuses are functioning well. We are also in the process of intensifying our economic statistics programme, in collaboration with our partners, focusing on basic sectoral economic statistics and on the SNA 2008. In 2009, UNSD will undertake further steps in such areas as economic census, manufacturing statistics, trade statistics, tourism statistics with a purpose of identifying good practices and promoting them among the countries. In this regard, I am pleased to announce that the second International Workshop on Economic Census will be held in July this year in Korea, hosted by the Korean National Statistical Office. We will take advantage of this opportunity to

prepare our handbook on 'Good Practices in Economic Census'. We believe that this focus on basic economic statistics will bring long-term benefits and will support the implementation of the System of National Accounts. As guided by the decisions of the Commission, we will work with all the stakeholders, especially the regional commissions, on the implementation of 2008 SNA, with particular emphasis on the developing countries.

The unprecedented turmoil warrants swift and coordinated statistical initiatives. UNSD will work with international organizations and countries to identify and remedy data gaps. In the immediate future, UNSD will work with the countries and conduct a number of meetings on the following topics: first, the methodology on generating high quality flash estimates of economic performance, their international comparability, and the communication strategy of such estimates; second, the technical implications on SNA compilation arising from recent government interventions around the world; third, the need to develop additional indicators on the performance of the economy and the financial markets for effective monitoring. We look forward to the support of the countries and the international organizations.

UNSD will continue to devote significant efforts to work on a framework of environmental statistics encompassing climate change statistics. In the same vein, we will also intensify our work on the environmental-economic accounting. We are grateful to the countries that have voiced their support to this programme and pledged contributions in cash and in kind during the Commission deliberation. We will be guided by the decisions of the Commission on climate change with a strong emphasis on knowledge transfer to the developing countries.

UNSD's work programme benefited from financial support from the countries. I would like to thank China, India, Italy, Ireland, Republic of Korea, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, and United Kingdom for their contributions in 2008 to our Trust Fund for capacity development activities. We hope more countries would come forward this year and support financially our activities.

Enhancing data dissemination at country and global level

UNSD fully recognizes the importance to help countries to make their statistical information more accessible to the users. We will be starting a programme to assist countries in all aspects of data dissemination, especially with respect to the MDGs. We will work with all stakeholders on this effort, especially the UN Regional Commissions and other sub-regional entities. At the global level, we will continue to improve UNdata as a gateway to access statistical information contained in the UN system databases and as a link to all data services provided by countries.

UNSD work programme 2010/11

As you may know, the United Nations functions in a two-year budgetary cycle. Currently, the budget and work programme for the years 2010 and 2011 is being finalized for adoption by the General Assembly at the end of this year 2009. You'll find the specific work programme for the Statistics Division in document E/CN.3/2009/27. The strategic framework, containing the objectives, the expected accomplishments and the indicators of achievement, has already been reviewed by the Statistical Commission at its thirty-ninth session and was subsequently approved by the General Assembly. The new information contained in document E/CN.3/2009/27 refers to the detailed list of outputs.

According to UN budget and programme procedures, and due to the fact that the budget approval process is now fairly advanced, this document is presented to the Commission for information. I, therefore, invite the Commission to take note of the Division's 2010/11 work programme. Any comments you may have are welcome and will certainly assist me in the future management of the Division.

Update on the implementation of the current work programme 2008/09:

I am pleased to report that the implementation of the 2008/09 programme is progressing smoothly and that virtually all planned outputs will be produced in time. Nonetheless, due to changing priorities some adjustments had to be made, namely:

- To allow for broader preparatory consultation with member states the following 3 outputs are proposed to be deferred from 2009 to 2010: (i) expert group to endorse technical material in support of the implementation of the revised international recommendations for distributive trade statistics, (ii) revision of the principles and recommendations for vital statistics and (iii) update of the international classification of activities for time-use surveys (internet and print).
- To further enhance the current website on methodological work, the present form will be terminated and instead, a web base reference library of statistical methodological publications will be developed.

I invite the Commission to approve these adjustments in our current work programme and to comment on the strategic directions as outlined.

Thank you.