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DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION

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Opening Statement

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Ms Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Secretary of ESCAP

Dear Colleagues,

I am delighted to have the opportunity to address this distinguished gathering of chief statisticians from the Asia-Pacific countries. In 2009, the global statistical community warmly welcomed the decision of the ESCAP Commission taken during its sixty-fourth session to re-establish this Committee on Statistics. At the inaugural session, I observed that the new Committee is a great step forward in strengthening the global statistical system through actions in a vibrant and dynamic region. In the past two years, you have already made a noticeable impact on the region's statistical development.

The United Nations Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs has worked together closely with the ESCAP Statistics Division and member countries for many years now. Most recently, we jointly implemented the Development Account project on *Improvement of Informal Sector and Informal Employment Measurement* which was nominated for the UN21 Award and was one of the two finalists in the category "Inter-departmental collaboration". This project was built on an existing strong framework of inter-regional collaboration and showed the vital role of regional commissions in supporting the development of international statistical standards and helping countries in their implementation through capacity building and technical assistance.

Building and improving sustainable statistical capacity is an important task that requires a coordinated approach at country, regional and global levels. At the national level, the challenge is to create an effective network of all producers of official statistics – the national statistical system under the leadership of the national statistical office. At the regional level, governing mechanisms, such as this Committee on Statistics, are a crucial element, to satisfy the regional data needs and also to support national efforts to

strengthen statistical systems and capacity. Finally, at the international level, the United Nations Statistical Commission is committed to lead the effort towards the strengthening of the global statistical system, which is based on the foundation of the national systems, and which strives to satisfy the demand for comparable global data in a coordinated and effective manner.

The global statistical community has been very much encouraged by the Plan of Action adopted at the recent High-level Summit on the Millennium Development Goals during the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly, which included, among many other issues, references to development of statistical capacity. The General Assembly has recognized the importance of strengthening statistical capacity to produce adequate, timely, reliable and disaggregated data, including demographic data, in order to design better programmes and policies for sustainable development. With this document, all member states are committed to strengthening the national statistical systems, including for effectively monitoring progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and have reiterated the need to increase efforts in support of statistical capacity-building in developing countries.

We, together with our development partners, need to make the global statistical system more robust and better equipped to cope with the new and diverse needs for data. There is no doubt that additional resources and, in some cases, strengthened legislative frameworks will be needed to improve the ability of national statistical offices to collect the necessary data. Let me underscore the importance of making progress in improving data availability and information sharing of agreed basic range of population, economic, social and environmental statistics which is indicated as the first strategic goal in the work programme of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics for 2020. The new technologies such as the Internet, mobile telephones, and social networks should be fully explored in order to create opportunities for unlocking the power of our data and translating statistics into knowledge and action. The UNSD took an important step toward unlocking the power of statistical information through establishing the UNData portal which currently provides free access to 32 databases and more than 60 million records. To take advantage

of the opportunities offered by significant innovations in census technology, we are offering a free software package - CensusInfo for disseminating census data on CD-ROM and on the Internet developed by the Division, in partnership with the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) to each interested country in the region.

In the area of statistical training I wish to commend the work of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific. In August 2010, the Institute celebrated forty years of assisting developing countries in building capability in official statistics. Ever since SIAP launched its first training programme in 1970, the impact of its training has been felt in 127 countries of the Asia-Pacific region and around the world. As a result of the systematic transfer of knowledge, the government statisticians who participated in the SIAP training programmes have been successfully contributing towards improvements of official statistics in their own countries.

The 40th Anniversary celebration provided an occasion not only to take stock of the achievements of the past but also to envisage the future role of the Institute, particularly in the face of increasing demands of official statistics for evidence-based policy and decision-making. I would like to acknowledge the excellent partnership the UNSD has with the Institute in statistical capacity-building and I am pleased to note how it is gradually growing into the leading training hub for official statistics in the region, providing and coordinating high quality training services, contributing to the establishment of a network of official statisticians and representing the region's interest by taking active role in global development of official statistics.

I also wish to acknowledge the increasing number of countries willing to take on the task of providing statistical training. I had the opportunity of visiting the training institutes of Indonesia and Korea which have wonderful premises and excellent training programmes. China has just launched its China International Statistical Training Centre in collaboration with the UN Statistics. These are important initiatives worthy of our strongest support.

In concluding, I wish to extend my appreciation of the ESCAP region's contributions to the global statistical system and to recognize the important role played by the Committee on Statistics in advancing statistical development. I wish to reaffirm UNSD's strongest support of your important initiatives.

Thank you.