

GLOBAL FORUM ON GENDER STATISTICS
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Opening Statement

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Dear Colleagues,

I would like to join ISTAT in welcoming you all to this important meeting. As one of the organizers, we feel very encouraged to see so many offices and institutions represented here today -- national statistical offices, ministries, women's organizations, development partners, international agencies and UN entities.

Your presence here today testifies to the enormous interest in the development of gender statistics, and the urgent need to accelerate progress in this field. Through the Beijing Platform for Action, the participants of the historic 4th world conference on women in Beijing in 1995 called on the international community to generate and disseminate sex-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation (Strategic Objective H.3). Since then, the Statistics Division and the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs have been working diligently to improve countries' capacity to produce reliable gender statistics.

In 2005, the Statistics Division conducted an assessment of data availability in gender statistics and on progress made in the development of gender statistics since the start of the International Women's Decade, in 1975. The major conclusions from the assessment, presented in our publication *The World's Women 2005*, were somewhat disappointing. Whereas some progress had been made in some areas, overall we found that the production and dissemination of the necessary gender statistics and indicators had not progressed as needed and expected. For example, population and enrolment statistics have been widely reported but statistics on births, deaths and economic activity did not receive the same level of attention. A large number of countries are still unable to provide data by sex on births, deaths and wages. Furthermore, data on many other concerns voiced in Beijing are not available for most countries, for example statistics on violence against women and women's participation in the informal economy. Not only has progress been slow, but it seems that the major advances in the pre-Beijing period have slackened in the post-Beijing era.

It is disappointing to observe that gender statistics have not progressed as much as we wanted. Clearly, countries need to take the gender issues more seriously and increase their efforts to monitor progress. On the part of international agencies, we also need to renew our efforts. In 1980s, when our programme in gender statistics first began, we produced the first set of publications which reviewed the relevance of existing concepts and methods and identified the basic set of statistics and indicators that would be required to assess the situation of women. We prepared a compendium of 40 indicators that was distributed at the Third World Conference on Women, in Nairobi, with an accompanying wall chart. Through the 1990s, these efforts continued. We prepared several manuals, issued our gender statistics database (Wistat) every four years, conducted training workshops and published the series *The World's Women*. Our successes in each of these areas of activity were primarily due to the good collaboration and support we had from United Nations funds and programmes, and development partners, especially the World Bank, and the cooperation with the national and regional institutions. At that time, we had a global gender statistics programme with many active partners.

But our own efforts have slackened due to a reduction in manpower and financial resources. Our gender database, Wistat, which was widely used, was discontinued after 2000. Other activities have also been reduced. At this point in time, we must identify the shortfalls in our efforts and the challenges ahead. We should draw from these lessons and experiences and devise strategies to accelerate the advancement of gender statistics. The collaborative effort that was largely responsible for the early advances in gender statistics has slackened and must be renewed.

It is against this background that we envision this Global Forum to be the first of a series of international meetings on gender statistics to be held annually with the purpose of promoting the advancement of quality gender statistics among decision makers and other stakeholders. To this end, we see some of the key objectives of the Forum as being:

- Re-launch the platform for global collaboration among all partners in the work for the development of gender statistics. The official launch of the

Global Gender Statistics Programme (GGSP) that will take place with this forum is a key step in that direction.

- Review technical and methodological developments in selected areas both at the national and international levels and recommend actions for further developments of gender statistics in these areas, including securing high-level commitment for their implementation.
- Launch of GenderInfo, an adaptation of DevInfo, to present selected gender statistics and indicators using a simple but comprehensive tool. GenderInfo was developed in response to the continuous demand by users for a gender statistics database, after the production of Wistat was discontinued.

At the United Nations Statistics Division we are firmly committed to bring this programme forward and are ready to facilitate the international agreement on the necessary standards and guidelines for gender statistics, through our continuous dialogue with national statistical offices, and to assist national statistical systems to fully integrate a gender perspective in their work. We look forward to collaborating with all of you from both national and international organizations in this effort, through this Forum and the Interagency and Expert Group established one year ago and which will meet again after this Forum.

I wish you all successful deliberations. Thank you all for coming and for supporting the advancement of Gender Statistics.