

ECOSOC consideration of the Statistical Commission report

New York, 25 July 2014

Statement by Ms. Gabriella Vukovich

Acting Chair of the United Nations Statistical Commission

Thank you, Chair.

First let me tell you how pleased we, the statistical community are, to have the opportunity to give a brief presentation on our activities to ECOSOC. I would also like to thank ECOSOC for the previous support given to statistics, to the Statistical Commission and especially for the endorsement of the Fundamental Principles of the Official Statistics. Following that endorsement, the General Assembly also endorsed this very important document. Let me convey our appreciation for your support. I would not like to present the report of the whole Statistical Commission as it is; I would like to highlight some of the activities we have been carrying out during the past few months and in the past year.

I would like to stress that statistics does not operate in a vacuum. We always have to be conscious of the surroundings of the users of statistics and we always try to have an intensive dialogue with the users and the stakeholders of statistics. Our activities are horizontal; statistics touch most of the areas or the phenomena of the world. In that sense we have a special mission to engage in a dialogue with all activities that are taken on by UN bodies, especially during this time when the Post-2015 agenda is discussed and is a concern in all UN activities. In this context the Statistical Commission has established a Friends-of-the-Chair group, which is working systematically on statistical briefing notes for the Open Working Group (OWG) on sustainable development. We present these notes to the OWG to assist in selecting the targets for the Post-2015 agenda. These targets for the time being seem to be very extensive which may make monitoring difficult. We also formulate recommendations on the monitoring and evaluation of the targets in the future. For that reason we are systematically exploring the proposed targets and indicators, as well as their measurability and availability. We are also drawing attention to some of the data gaps that exist mostly in developing countries but also in developed countries. Some of the indicators and targets are difficult to obtain at this moment. For this reason we always call the attention of users and of the various bodies that decide on targets and monitoring to the need for sustainable statistics, to have sustainable statistics in order to carry out the monitoring of sustainable development. It is up to politicians and policy-makers to decide the targets but we strongly advise intensive dialogue with statisticians in the process of selecting to make sure that those targets will be measurable.

Another important item that we have been dealing with during the past year is the data revolution. This term was raised by the high level panel of eminent persons on sustainable development. The notion of a data revolution has caught a lot of attention which is a good thing in one sense because it raised the awareness of policymakers and the general public for the importance of evidence based decision-making, the importance of solid information to underpin the development agenda. However this notion of the data revolution is also problematic in the sense that it causes some confusion and raises false expectations, that the data revolution can be a fast and efficient process

in the near future. In the context of the data revolution I would like to draw your attention to six points. One is building national capacity which is also linked to the monitoring of the post 2015 targets and indicators. We believe that systematic and heavy investments are needed to have sustainable statistical systems, especially in developing countries. I would also like to emphasize that the systems of official statistics have to be stringent in these countries because those surveys which are carried out and financed by various funds and international organizations may not always contribute to the establishment of statistical capacity in the countries. We also identified another important issue in the context of the data revolution that is the modernization of statistical processes. This is undertaken in all national statistical institutions and this will result and already has resulted in making the statistical process more effective. The development of new indicators in the context of the Post-2015 agenda is also very important in terms of the data revolution, especially in the field of inequality and governance, where we identified serious data gaps. The data revolution also has to show itself in the innovative use of IT in all stages of the process of data collection, data processing and dissemination. We also consider big data to be part of the data revolution, that is, big data as the availability of enormous masses of data mostly via the internet that could be used to produce statistics. This means the use of non-traditional sources to produce statistics, which is a big challenge because of the need to elaborate appropriate new methodologies. I would like to caution on that challenge because the appropriate methodologies and the sustainability of those methodologies have to be approved and evaluated before we really start using big data sources for official statistics extensively. Finally, the sixth item I would like to draw your attention to in the context of the data revolution is open data which means that all official statistical agencies have to make data, metadata and microdata sets easily accessible at no cost or low cost to make sure that statistical data are extensively utilized by users. This also contributes to transparency and to the accountability of statistical systems. The Statistical Commission has taken the lead in all these six components of the data revolution. We had a long discussion in the statistical forum connected to the Statistical Commission during which we also invited outside actors of the data revolution and we assessed the possibilities of using these various data sources for statistics.