Workshop for African Countries on the Implementation of International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics,

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 27-30 May 2008

Opening Statement

Dear Colleagues,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you as participants of the workshop on the implementation of the International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics which is jointly organized by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) and the African Center for Statistics (ACS) of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. The workshop is part of the UNSD initiative to enhance the knowledge and use of good practices in the collection and compilation of basic economic statistics in general and distributive trade statistics in particular in African countries; to enable you to meet more effectively the needs of policy makers, business community; and to support the implementation of the 1993 System of National Accounts and statistical development in general.

This workshop is also in continuation of the UNSD joint work and fruitful collaboration with ACS, initiated last year and geared towards the advancement of statistical capacity-building for African countries. I recall the two workshops on basic economic statistics that took place in Pretoria, South Africa on 23-26 July, 2007 and in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 16-19 October, 2007. The conclusions and recommendations from these workshops cover a

wide range of relevant issues which are taken into account in the UNSD work on distributive trade statistics.

At the outset, let me re-affirm that distributive trade plays an important role in the economies of both developed and developing countries. Distributive trade is the sector that ensures the principal link between the producers and the end consumers. Increasingly, it provides a link between producers and buyers operating on the global markets as exporters and importers. Contribution of distributive trade activities in terms of value added and employment is steadily increasing. At the same time, the demand for timely, high quality and internationally comparable data on detailed (structural) and short-term distributive trade statistics is increasing even more.

Organization of trade has evolved a lot and statistics need to reflect the new tendencies. The responsibility of National Statistical Offices as producers of distributive trade statistics is, in that sense, considerable. Aside from the challenges of compiling distributive trade statistics from scarce data sources, National Statistical Offices also face the challenge of disseminating the data more effectively to a very heterogeneous community of users, including the regional and international organizations. UNSD and the ACS are strongly committed to provide assistance to African countries in this endeavor so they will be able to meet these challenges.

The main objective of the present workshop is to present and discuss with you the new *International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics 2008 (IRDTS 2008)*, recently adopted by the thirty-ninth session of the United Nations Statistical Commission. These recommendations provide a comprehensive methodological framework for collection and compilation of

distributive trade statistics in all countries irrespective of the level of development of their statistical systems. We would like to hear your views on the general applicability of IRDTS 2008 recommendations, having in mind that they are not intended to be prescriptive and should be implemented by your statistical offices in a way appropriate to your own circumstances, including identified user needs, resources, priorities and respondent burden.

The work on the preparation of IRDTS 2008 was initiated in 2005 with the establishment of the Expert Group on DTS, mandated to assist the UNSD in the review and revision of *International Recommendations on Statistics of Distributive Trades and Services 1974*. There have been clear indications for the updating of this document. Policy makers in government, managers in the business community and the general public require from us statisticians to compile sound structural and performance statistics on retail and wholesale trade using efficient procedures and updated methodologies. The methods should also be consistent across countries so that the international comparability is ensured and fostered. Therefore, the old recommendations were revised to capture the changes in distributive trade sector and the emerging methods of using innovative data sources. Our work was also guided by the need for maintaining the coherence between the statistical standards for various economic fields of statistics such as the *International Recommendations for Industrial Statistics 2008 (IRIS 2008)*, and the consistency and alignment of IRDTS 2008 with the macroeconomic and cross-functional standards, such as the 1993 SNA, Rev.1, ISIC, Rev.4 and CPC, Ver.2.

UNSD would like to express its gratitude to Egypt, Ghana and South Africa, which represented African region in the Expert Group on DTS for their contribution to the successful drafting and completion of the IRDTS 2008.

During its thirty-seventh session, the Statistical Commission advised UNSD to develop practical guidance on the compilation of distributive trade statistics, including a description of good practices. In compliance with this advice and with the aim of improving the international comparability and enhancing capacities of developing countries, UNSD plans to prepare two follow-up manuals to complement IRDTS 2008: *Distributive Trade Statistics: Compilers Manual* and *Indices of Distributive Trade: A Handbook of Good Practice*. We see the forum of the present workshop as one that can constructively contribute to the preparation of these manuals by identifying special circumstances of organization of distributive trade in Africa and challenges and good practices of African countries in the collection, compilation and dissemination of distributive trade statistics. The deliberations during the second part of the workshop when the state of distributive trade statistics compilation in African countries will be reviewed will help us to achieve this objective.

In conclusion, we, my colleague Thierno and I, are pleased to see that the workshop has brought together experts from African countries with diverse experiences and needs. We look forward to your active participation, hearing your views and comments that we can build on in our future work on distributive trade statistics. I wish us all a successful meeting,

Thank you,