



UNITED NATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION

Expert Group Meeting on Industrial Statistics
Expert Group Meeting on Distributive Trade Statistics

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Opening Statement

Joint Session
Expert Group on Industrial Statistics
Expert group on Distributive Trade Statistics

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Dear colleagues,

It is my pleasure to welcome you as participants of the Second Meetings of the United Nations Expert Groups on Industrial statistics and Distributive Trade Statistics. This is the first time that we are holding a joint opening session for two Expert Group Meetings. I understand that several sessions of the two Groups will also be held jointly. This innovative arrangement will help us resolve some common issues and greatly facilitate our work this week.

Background

This week's meetings are in continuation of our joint work initiated in 2005. I recall that these two Expert Groups were established in 2005 with the mandate by the Statistical Commission to assist UNSD in the review and revision of the International Recommendations for Industrial Statistics of 1983 and the International Recommendations for Distributive Trade Statistics of 1975. Based on the guidance provided by the first expert group meetings in 2005 and follow-up consultations, the UNSD has prepared the present two documents containing the draft revised recommendations on industrial and distributive trade statistics for your review.

The needs for updating these two documents are clear. Policy makers in government, managers in the business community and the general public require us to compile sound structural and performance statistics on the industry and retail trade sectors using efficient procedures and updated methodologies. The methods should also be consistent across countries so that international comparability is ensured and fostered. The existing recommendations for these two international guidelines are revised to capture the changes in the respective sectors, and the emerging methods of using innovative data sources.

In addition to the global statistical response in meeting the policy requirements, our work is also guided by the need for maintaining statistical coherence between the statistical standards on basic statistics and other frameworks that we have already adopted. Here I would like to refer to the update of the 1993 SNA and the revision of ISIC and CPC classification frameworks in terms of changes in definitions of units, treatment of goods sent abroad for processing, and valuation issues to mention just a few. Therefore, I would like to reiterate the necessity for consistency and alignment of the International Recommendations with the macroeconomic and cross functional standards on concepts, definitions and terminology.

UNSD program on integrated economic statistics

I would like to say a few words on our approach to the compilation of economic statistics. We have responded to the demands of relevance and statistical consistency in revising the international recommendations on basic statistics such as industrial and distributive trade statistics and by integrating and broadening our program on economic statistics. Increasingly, the components of our ongoing and expanding statistical program are interrelated - the SNA, ISIC and CPC, tourism accounts and statistics, environmental-economic accounting. Moreover, we are taking further steps in promoting economic censuses, business registers, and use of administrative data in our present and future activities in economic statistics.

I would like to emphasize that the revision of these international recommendations should be seen as part of building an *integrated economic statistics programme*. This implies that the conceptual frameworks, data sources and compilation methods of industrial and distributive trade statistics should be harmonized to the extent possible in current revision with other areas of economic statistics, particularly the SNA. The benefits of such an integrated approach will increase policy relevance of economic statistics, improve the capability of

countries to produce data in a cost effective way and, at the same time, ensure better comparability.

The need for conducting revisions of recommendations in various economic fields of statistics in an integrated way has been underlined by the findings of the recently held work session of the Friends of the Chair established by the Statistical Commission to operationalize the concept of integration in economic statistics. The group agreed that integration is a worthwhile goal driven by the needs of policy makers and other users for coherence of statistical output. It can also contribute to reduction of respondent burden, cost and still ensure timeliness. Integration calls for greater consistency of definitions, to the extent possible, as differences in basic concepts in various fields of economic statistics are seen a major cause of data incomparability at both national and international levels.

Concerning quality of data and exhaustiveness of coverage, it is imperative to review our data collection efforts in economic statistics. I am very disappointed that so little efforts internationally have been put in the development of statistical methods in the collection of sound business statistics. It has been proposed that one of the main components of an integrated economic statistics program is the central role of business registers, their development and upkeep in the integration process, and the importance of administrative data. And yet, very little efforts have been spent to see how these developments could be implemented in the developing world, especially with respect to the capability of the national statistical system in the full use of administrative data. The UNSD is now starting a process to assist the regions to review the various methods in the collection and compilation of economic data, and the contribution of questionnaire design toward data consistency. Meetings are being planned in Africa and Latin America. Several of these ideas are related to the topics that both Expert Groups will discuss and we look forward to your further guidance on this.

As a consequence of our effort to apply an integrated approach to various areas of statistics, the revised international recommendations on industrial statistics and distributive trade statistics need to adopt, to the extent possible, consistent concepts, definitions and recommendations on data items to be collected and published, data sources and data collection methods. Therefore, to ensure that mutually consistent recommendations are developed, a significant number of joint sessions of the two Expert Groups will be held during this second round of meetings. Activity-specific matters would be discussed in separate sessions.

The way forward

As you are well aware, the past practice of the UN was to issue the separate international recommendations on industrial statistics, construction statistics and distributive trade statistics and other services. We have continued this modular approach. However, my commitment is to submit coherent international recommendations to the Statistical Commission. The two documents will fully reflect the intrinsic character of these two different economic sectors and these documents useful not only for the statistical organizations but for the business groups as well.

Concerning the process of finalizing these publications, UNSD will produce new drafts of the two international recommendations and circulate them to all countries for comments in September 2007. Based on the comments obtained from the global consultation, UNSD will finalize the recommendations and submit them for adoption to the February 2008 session of the Statistical Commission.

In conclusion, I am pleased to see that this second round of meetings has brought together experts of countries from different regions and with different experiences, circumstances and needs. I look forward to your active participation, hearing your views and comments that we can build on in the finalization of both sets of recommendations so that the drafts can be submitted to the Statistical Commission for adoption as planned.

Before you turn to your busy agenda and professional discussions, allow me to express my appreciation for your contribution to the work of the Expert Groups and wish you a successful meeting.

Thank you.