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**Third Meeting of the UN Committee of Experts on
Environmental-Economic Accounting
New York, 26-27 June 2008
United Nations Secretariat Building, Conference Room C**

OPENING STATEMENT

**Paul Cheung, Director
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Dear Colleagues,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the Third Meeting of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting (UNCEEA). The Committee has come a long way since its inception under the leadership of Walter Radermacher. It has established itself as the strategic body providing leadership, vision and direction to environmental-economic accounting and related statistics. Recently, at the Conference on Climate Change and Official Statistics, the international statistical community recognized the Committee's role and recommended that the UNCEEA oversee the statistical work on climate change. The Committee would thus represent the statistical community vis-à-vis the scientific community represented by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The Conference on Climate Change and Official Statistics requested the Committee to consider changing its name, mandate and governance structure to reflect this broader role. I am pleased that you will discuss in this meeting the new role and responsibilities of the Committee, which will further elevate the status and stature of the new Committee.

Climate change is high on the international agenda. Until present, the statistical community has been absent from the debate on measuring climate change leaving it exclusively to the scientific community. Now it is the time for the statistical community to become engaged in the debate and prove that it has a lot to offer: it can deliver high quality data based on sound methodologies – statistical standards – linking environmental, economic and social information. The broad mandate to cover environment statistics and in particular climate change related information would not mean a change in priority but rather it will provide the new Committee with the opportunity to showcase the usefulness of its flagship project on the elevation of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting to an international statistical standard to the users' community.

The Conference on Climate Change and Official Statistics has confirmed that the revision of the SEEA is an urgent matter which should be given the highest priority on the international statistical agenda. The new Committee has to move ahead and show that it can deliver the standard for environment statistics and accounts that the world has been waiting for so long. For this reason, I support the decision of the Bureau of the UNCEEA to launch the project on the revision of the SEEA on 1 January 2009 properly funded with the editor and possibly the project manager in place and ready to work on this important project. Until now, a lot of us have contributed in kind and/or in cash to the project mostly through advancing the methodological agenda as part of the work of the city groups. The European Environment Agency is proposing to take the lead in developing land and ecosystem accounting; UNSD has taken on the responsibility of drafting the SEEA-Energy and the SEEA-MFA by hiring experts to assist us in this task. The SEEA-Energy and the SEEA-MFA as well as the already adopted standard SEEA-Water will provide inputs in terms of text and standard tables to the revised SEEA. I look at the Chair and the Bureau to develop a funding strategy encompassing various stakeholders, including development banks, international development agencies, private sector and non-governmental organizations. The proper funding of the project on the revision of the SEEA is of outmost importance to ensure its timeliness and success.

I am pleased that you will discuss the project management framework for the revision of the SEEA and decide on a realistic timeline with deliverables. I think that it is very important that we collectively agree on the objective, the process to reach it and the time frame and charge ahead. Notwithstanding the achievements of the London Group, the contributions of its members and the leadership of its Chair, Mark de Haan of Statistics Netherlands, the Advisory Group, which will evolve from the London Group on Environmental Accounting, will provide the necessary technical support to the revision process through the personal commitment of its members. It will function as the

technical arm of the Committee responsible for discussing and agreeing on solutions on issues before the formal endorsement of the Committee.

The broader mandate of the Committee will also require the Committee to get involved in statistical fields that have an interface with the environment. I am pleased that the Committee will discuss the links with agriculture statistics as this topic is very high in the policy agenda (i.e. food and energy security.) and I am sure that the Committee can help in shaping up the international programme on agricultural statistics currently being developed.

The implementation of the SEEA-Water and water statistics in countries has been very successful. Since its adoption as a standard by the United Nations Statistical Commission, an increasing number of countries have implemented or are in the process of implementing the water statistics and accounts. We are working in close collaboration with UNDP promoting the SEEAW for the derivation of indicators for integrated water resource management. The finalization of the International Recommendations on Water Statistics expected before the end of the year will provide an additional impetus and guidance for countries to establish or strengthen their programmes on water statistics and accounts.

The Global Assessment of Environment Statistics and Accounts has been a successful exercise that we have undertaken under the auspices of the UNCEEA. Phase 2 focusing on specific resources has recently been launched and we are in the process of processing and analyzing the responses received. We are now in the process of analyzing the results of the assessment of water statistics and accounting and energy accounting. The first assessment will provide useful inputs in understanding country practices in the compilation of environment statistics and accounts, issues in their implementation and dissemination. This is very useful information for us to better design targeted technical assistance. The Assessment on Energy Accounts will provide us with information on

country practices in the compilation of energy accounts which will be a useful input in the drafting of the SEEA-Energy and of the SEEA.

Last but not least, I would like to thank Walter Radermacher who has successfully lead the UNCEEA and brought it to a new level. As you know, he will be taking up the position of Director General of Eurostat. Because the Chair of UN Committees is customarily held by countries, Walter will have to relinquish his position as Chair of the UNCEEA. We have lost a very capable chair but we have gained an important ally who will support the activities of the UNCEEA in his new endeavors.

At the end of the meeting you will have to elect a new Chair, who will have the very important role of leading the revision process of the SEEA as well as of ensuring that the statistical community affirms itself as an important player in the measurement of climate change.

This Committee has a very important strategic role in shaping up the international programme of work in environment statistics and environmental-economic accounting. The decisions taken by this Committee should trickle down to the programmes of work in the regional commissions and in countries. The expectations of the international statistical community are high and I am sure that this Committee can fulfill them.

In closing I would like to wish you success in the deliberations during the next two days and I am looking forward to the outcomes of this meeting.

Thank you for your attention.