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STATISTICS DIVISION

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Opening statement

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Dear Colleagues,

I would like to welcome you at the EGM on the International Recommendations for Water Statistics. You came here to share with us your experience and expertise and help us in the finalization of this important piece of methodological work.

I am happy to see around the table representatives from the statistical community and the water community. I am happy that these two communities are working together towards the development of an information system for water. This collaboration in itself is an important recognition of our mutual responsibility in this area of statistics.

It is my expectation that the Statistical Community will prove to be a valuable partner for the water community, providing them with the much needed normative standard and agreed concepts, definitions and classifications for a relevant, reliable and comparable information systems across countries at the macro level as well as at relevant spatial and temporal disaggregations.

Water statistics and accounting are priority areas of the UN Statistics Division. As you well know, UNSD serves as the Secretariat of the Statistical Commission, the apex entity in the international statistical system where international statistical standards and activities are considered and approved. In addition to compiling and disseminating global statistical information and supporting countries' efforts to strengthen their national statistical systems, UNSD develops standards and norms for statistical activities so that the basic information is relevant, reliable and comparable across time and space.

UNSD, with the help of national and international experts including many of you, developed the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting for Water Resources, the SEEA-W. The SEEA-W directly links water data to the economic accounts through a shared structure, principles of valuation, set of definitions and classifications. It has become the reference standard for water accounting with its adoption by the UN Statistical Commission as an interim international statistical standard in 2007.

At an expert group meeting that discussed the SEEA-W in May 2005, we had set the target of 25 countries embarking on the implementation of water accounting by the end of 2005. We have gone a long way in implementation since then: according to the *Global Assessment of Water Statistics and Water Accounts* that was launched by UNSD in April 2008, currently more than 70 countries have a programme on water statistics, and a total of 43 countries are committed to the implementation of the water accounts, with 32 countries doing it on a regular basis and 11 planning to implement them in the near future.

In the same survey, the responding countries identified the compilation and implementation issues in water statistics and accounts that should be addressed by the international statistical community. They indicated that there are needs for internationally agreed methodologies, classifications, standards as well as practical guidance on how to embark on or strengthen their water statistics programme and how to compile the SEEA-W standard tables, the international questionnaires and the key water indicators.

The International Recommendations for Water Statistics is an important step in satisfying these needs. By defining an agreed set of recommended and supplementary data items, it provides guidance for the development of national water statistics and for the implementation of the SEEA-W. The IRWS supports and complements the SEEA-W and aims at the harmonization of concepts, definitions and classifications of data items and linking them to economic statistics. Mainstreaming water statistics in the official statistical system requires that the water information is directly linked to the international statistical standards in economic statistics.

The IRWS as well as the SEEA-W are also important contributions to the development of consistent and coherent indicators. Most if not all water-related indicators measuring the relationship between the economy and the hydrological system can be derived using the data items recommended in the IRWS and the SEEAW.

Both the SEEA-W and IRWS are founded on country practices. Their drafting is the result of bringing together various approaches into a common framework in which all stakeholders are reflected.

We have been working on this document for a long time. As with any new field of statistics, there is an element of discovery when developing international recommendations. In some cases it is the elaboration of existing concepts or classifications, and in other cases it is the discovery of gaps in experience or practice.

The interdisciplinary nature of water statistics further compounds the time required to ensure coherence. We have been reviewing over 700 physical and monetary variables for water, from the SEEAW, international data collections and water indicators. As a result of this effort, the 150 recommended data items and 130 supplementary data items in the IRWS are able to support countries developing water statistics, water accounts and water indicators, as well as the international data collections.

Another issue encountered during the drafting of the IRWS was a lack of technical terms and definitions that could be directly applied to water statistics. Many statistical terms and definitions are defined in relation to survey data or administrative data, but have not been applied to hydrological or meteorological data before. In addition to this, all terms and definitions in the IRWS needed to be meaningful to not only statisticians but also to others involved in water statistics. These are, among others, the conceptual, methodological and technical issues the International Recommendations have to address to ensure coherence across the international statistical system, and between all types of statistics, be they social, economic or environmental. Achieving this coherence has taken significantly more time and effort than expected, but is time well spent, and UNSD wants to thank the reference group, water experts and all others who have helped UNSD drafting these recommendations for their efforts to date.

The next step after the IRWS is completed will be to develop a compilation guide to assist countries on how to collect and compile agreed data items in IRWS and populate the SEEA-W standard tables.

These international recommendations will definitely assist countries in strengthening their water statistics programme as well as the implementation of the SEEA-W. This will in turn result in more high quality water statistics being available to the users' community in achieving integrated water resources management and in measuring progress towards the Millennium Development Goals related to water.

I would like to thank you for your contributions and continued support in this endeavor and wish you success in your deliberations.