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Opening Statement

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Dear Colleagues,

I am delighted to have this opportunity to address such a distinguished gathering. It is a great pleasure to welcome you all to this second global meeting on gender statistics, which sees once again the presence of so many offices and institutions -- national statistical offices, ministries, women's machineries, regional commissions, and many partner agencies—from all regions of the world. This is a testimony of the continuous interest in fostering the development of gender statistics as indispensable tool for policy making and for achieving development.

As you are fully aware, over the last few decades, many international instruments – UN world conferences and other international fora – have attempted to incorporate a gender perspective in all policy areas, in order to make policies more effective. To the same end, some governments have designed and implemented new mechanisms to ensure that gender issues are mainstreamed in all national policies and programmes. These efforts however have often been undermined by the lack of adequate data to inform and monitor policies and have not been accompanied by improvements in the necessary statistics.

This has become more visible in recent years with the new global monitoring requirements, especially those efforts associated with the MDGs. We have become even more aware of how limited the availability of statistics is when it comes to assessing progress towards gender equality and the extent of gender equitable progress towards development goals. Harmonizing gender indicators and strengthening the data collection efforts for gender based indicators in MDG monitoring must be given stronger emphasis.

Yet, there has been some progress. We have now a few instruments and opportunities to ensure that all national statistical systems have the capacity to incorporate a gender dimension in their work—a number of recommendations and guidelines both at the national and international levels, concepts and definitions and surveys instruments. Some of these have proved effective, such as the case of time use surveys. Users and producers of statistics have begun to come together to define what information is needed and how it can be collected and analyzed.

While progress is slow, we are continuing to push ahead. Let me give a brief description of the efforts by the UN Statistics Division. We have continued to provide training on various aspects related to the production and dissemination of gender statistics, (including on the measurement of informal sector employment), engaged in technical assistance projects to strengthen countries' capacity to incorporate gender issues in data collection to better assess women and men's participation and contribution to the economy, and undertaken preparation of the next issue of "The World's Women: Trends and Statistics", to be launched in 2010.

I am pleased to inform you that there has also been progress in the development of indicators on violence against women. To further this task, the Statistical Commission established a group called the Friends of the Chair to rigorously evaluate a previously proposed list of indicators on violence against women. The group, chaired by Mexico's national statistical office, INEGI, the national statistical office of Mexico, has been working over this last year and will present its report at the forthcoming session of the commission in February.

Following the discussion and recommendations of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics, our office has also conducted a survey of gender statistics programmes and activities of national statistical offices worldwide to assess progress in the area and to inform the development of the Global Programme on Gender Statistics. Over 120 countries have provided information and the preparation of full report is now underway. Sharing with you few preliminary findings, I would like to outline that, out of 120 countries, 87 have indicated that their National Statistical Office has a gender unit or focal point dealing with the development of gender statistics. Almost all of them --82 countries-- reported activities related to producing and compiling gender statistics, training, incorporating gender issues into data collection and dissemination tools, and engaging with policy makers and other users to better define and use the necessary information.

This is very encouraging, but a number of gaps remain and progress in this field needs to accelerate. There is a continuing need for strengthening the capacity to produce and disseminate gender statistics and the need for training in the analysis of gender analysis. We must do more in the years to come.

This Global Forum hopes to provide the occasion to review best practices to integrate gender into censuses and surveys, and other technical developments in selected areas, such as the measurement of women's and men's work and their contribution to the economy. We look forward to working with all of you over the next few days.

I wish you all a fruitful discussion.