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**ECOSOC Panel of Chairpersons of Functional Commissions,
Monday 19 July 2004.**

Statement by Ms. Katherine K. Wallman, Chief Statistician, Office of Management and Budget, Executive Office of the President of the United States of America, Chairperson of the United Nations Statistical Commission.

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Mr. Vice-President, distinguished delegates,

In its 58 year history, the Statistical Commission has always had one central focus: Enhancing national and international statistical systems through the harmonization of international statistical standards and methods. The ultimate objective is the improvement of the availability and comparability of data. In an increasingly globalized world this is an all-the-more pressing objective, as in many countries private as well as public demands for data from other parts of the globe have increased significantly.

In light of our objective, the discussions in the Statistical Commission are largely technical in nature. As Chief Statisticians, we share a strong common professional experience - often across traditional economic and political dividing lines. This shared experience – indeed, a shared culture - helps us to find consensus on the many technical questions before us. The effective work of the Commission has resulted in tangible results in the form of numerous agreements on statistical standards in areas such as census methodologies and national accounts. These accomplishments have improved the comparability of data across the world. Our consensus on methods has also facilitated the exchange of practical experiences, the transfer of statistical 'technology' from one country to another. By speaking the same language and by working towards the same goal, we have been able to focus bilateral and multilateral technical cooperation activities with the objective of strengthening national statistical capacity. In this sense the harmonization of standards and methods greatly benefits in particular our colleagues in developing countries..

I am happy to report to you that at its 2004 session the Statistical Commission continued its work in this cooperative spirit. The 2004 session was well attended: In addition to the 24 members, a record number of 50 observers from countries and 36 observers from international organizations participated. The Commission discussed 31 reports covering a wide range of technical issues including, for example, social and health statistics, national accounting, and Information and Communication Technology statistics.

With respect to promoting collaboration with fellow functional commissions in areas of common interest, I am particularly pleased to inform you of an innovative

cooperative approach this year: At the invitation of the Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women, I participated as a co-chair in a high level roundtable discussion on measurement of progress, which was part of the regular session of the Commission on the Status of Women. As we took advantage of the fact that our two Commissions were meeting in New York during the same week, a number of delegates from the Statistical Commission were available to join me. I have been told that this kind of direct cooperation between functional commissions is unprecedented; it certainly led to a very interesting and productive exchange between users and producers of statistical information. In addition to this special event, the Statistical Commission continues to have a standing item on its agenda to review statistical implications of the work of other functional Commissions. This year we looked particularly at the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

Following the invitation of ECOSOC, we are also in a process to review our working methods. In many areas, such as the establishment of a rolling 4-year multiyear workplan and the reelection of Bureau members to provide continuity, we are already following the guidance given by the Council. In an effort to further improve the effectiveness of our sessions, I have just written to all participants of the 2004 Statistical Commission session to ask for their suggestions as we undertake this critical review of our working methods. With the assistance of my fellow Bureau members and the Secretariat, we will present concrete recommendations to the next Statistical Commission session in 2005.

In the context of conference follow-up, ECOSOC had asked the Statistical Commission in its resolution 2000/27 to serve as the intergovernmental focal point for the review of indicators. Consequently, the Commission has conducted an extensive technical review of almost 300 conference indicators and continues to work towards further harmonization and rationalization of indicators. This is a crucial task as member countries - even those with established statistical systems - continue to be overburdened with data requests.

Dear colleagues, the work to develop and agree upon a focused set of key indicators, and to build statistical capacity in all countries to produce these indicators, is a shared challenge for producers and users of statistical information. Statistical services in many countries will not be able to produce reliable and timely information for a long wish list of indicators. Political priorities have to be set by the users, such as this body, and resources have to be allocated accordingly. Technical advice can then be provided by the producers in the Statistical Commission on how to adapt existing data production capacities to address the relevant modern policy questions.

I would like to thank you again for giving me this opportunity to brief you on the work of the Statistical Commission, and I can assure you that we are looking forward to our future cooperation.