

**Statement on Programme Issues by Paul Cheung, director of the United Nations
Statistics Division to the 36th Session of the Statistical Commission**
New York, 04 March 2005

Dear delegates and colleagues,

As the Statistical Commission is aware, I took office in June 2004. This is the first Commission Session I am serving in the secretariat as Director of the United Nations Statistics Division [UNSD].

I am extremely happy that the participation in this Commission has been unprecedented. We have a total of over 75 countries represented by the National Statistical Offices of member states. The historical average has been around 45 or so. I am grateful for the assistance provided by France, UNFPA, and Paris21. I hope in the future other agencies could help as well.

I believe that if the United Nations Statistical Commission [UNSC] is truly to become the apex entity of the global statistical system, adequate representations from all regions and developmental status is extremely important. UNSD will strive to ensure that UNSC will live up to its reputation as the highest decision making body in the global statistical system, entrusted by the producers and users of official statistics.

The global statistical system will function properly if the member states are an integral part of the system. In this regard, UNSD will continue to expand its work in promoting participation by member states to be involved in all aspects of international statistical activities. This would range from expert group meetings, task forces, regional meetings, and especially the Commission itself. We have learnt from our work with countries that this feeling of being part of the statistical community through participation is critical in bringing countries together in international statistical activities.

The international agencies are also an integral part of the global statistical system. The Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities [CCSA] mechanism is working well in coordinating the work of the agencies. The members of the CCSA are prepared to step up the coordination. The creation of the International Household Network is a good example. Another example is the Country Information System which would help the agencies to share information on countries. The inter-agency Group on Millennium Development Goal [MDG] indicators has worked together extremely well. I must say that I am amazed by the level of coordination and agencies' commitment in the preparation of various MDG reports. The UNSD will continue to play a critical and central role in ensuring greater coordination in international statistical activities.

Let me now focus on some of the key initiatives:

a) UNSD will continue to work with our partners in developing international methodological standards and guidelines. In this regard, we place particular emphasis on the following:

- The revision of SNA 93 [System of National Accounts].
- The review of Industrial, Energy, and Distributive trade statistics so as to update the methodology and to assess their relevance to users.
- The review of principles and recommendations in relation to the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme.

b) It is extremely important that developing countries are able to improve their capacity to compile and disseminate core economic, social, and environmental data in response to national and international commitments and in accordance with international standards and frameworks. Over time, we at UNSD would like to see a clear and measurable increase in their capacity. There should also be an increased understanding of the underlying methodologies and assumptions in economic, social and environmental measurements as reflected in the manuals, principles, and classification schemes. Particular attention will be given to the following areas:

- The enhancement of countries capacity to conduct the next round of census, fully incorporating the latest changes in measurement and technical standards.
- The improvement of countries' basic statistical infrastructure and capacity for data collection programmes to produce a sustained flow of reliable and timely social and economic statistics. As mentioned, we will work with our partners to devise a strategy to help developing countries to produce core social and economic statistics.
- The systematic adoption of the internationally agreed changes to the UN System of National Accounts, to the extent allowed by their national capability.
- The improvement in the countries' capacity in analyzing the links between the environment and the economy, for instance in compiling environmental economic accounts for water.

c) We realize that countries face constant pressure to launch new statistical activities in response to new issues emerging from changing national and international requirements. For example, the recent Tsunami disaster has resulted in NSOs being tasked in producing new data. Doing new things also imply reviewing current statistical activities to assess their relevance and improving their quality. There is a role for UNSD here. We must stand ready to provide assistance to countries who wish to embark in new activities and help review the old ones. In doing this, it is important that we promote exchange of countries' experiences and at the same time provide technical assistance where needed.

d) We at UNSD recognize that statistical data are public good. It is important that we actively promote a programme of data dissemination at the national and the international level. We will promote good practices around the world and help develop an advocacy programme. In particular, the focus will be on:

- Improving the dissemination and use by national and international policy makers, of country indicators, especially those related to MDGs.
- Increasing the contribution of data and materials by countries to international databases as well as international inventory of best practices in managing statistical organizations and programmes.

e) UNSD released the Handbook of Management of Statistical Organization [3rd edition] a few years ago. The monograph has been extremely well received. It is important to have member states continue to participate in the discussion of governance and management issues related to national statistical systems. This would help them to improve their efficiency, productivity, responsiveness and accountability, in accordance to international principles and best practices.

In summary, UNSD enjoys a very good standing among the member states. We hope to increase our service standards to the member states and to build upon our good relationship with them. UNSD itself is changing. We are going through a generational change with the recent retirement of some senior staff. More will follow in the next few years. We will continue to build up a culture of competence, and of service to the member states.