



UNITED NATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION

**Expert Group Meeting
on Distributive Trade Statistics
New York, 22-25 August 2005**

Opening Statement

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Dear colleagues,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the first meeting of the United Nations Expert Group on distributive trade statistics. The importance of distributive trade in the national and global economy is well known. Wholesale and retail trades employ hundreds of millions of people and contribute greatly to GDP in all countries. It is not surprising that distributive trade statistics are always in a high demand. In recent years, in view of the intensifying globalization of national economies, there is a growing pressure from the user community to produce more internationally comparable data.

The goal of establishing of a uniform pattern for the measurement of distributive trade on a comparable basis was on the agenda of the United Nations Statistical Commission since mid 1950s. In 1958, at its ninth session, the Commission adopted a set of recommendations in this area. The Commission resumed its consideration of distributive trade statistics in mid 1970s and adopted the revised recommendations at its eighteenth session held in 1974. Those recommendations were published by UNSD in the document entitled *International Recommendations on Statistics of the Distributive Trades and Services*. Since then, significant developments have taken place making it imperative to revise the international recommendations in this area again.

These developments include changes in the ways distributive trade is conducted by businesses as a result of new technology and new management systems, use of the new data sources and compilation methods by national statistical offices and adoption of the new international methodological guidelines such as activity and product classifications and guidelines for national accounting. UNSD is now making a special effort to take into account all these developments and to update the methodological and operational foundations of distributive trade statistics.

Most countries do compile some distributive trade statistics. However, in many other countries that statistics is not sufficiently developed and does not satisfy needs of the policy makers, business community and the general public. There are concerns regarding availability of such data and their quality. There are also methodological issues arising from the construction and revision of the summary indices. In this context, the need for more effective approaches towards data compilation, index construction and for better harmonization of national methodologies becomes more and more apparent. The United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) recognizes this need and has made further improvements in compilation, analysis and dissemination of the internationally comparable distributive trade statistics one of its priority activities in 2005 -2007.

This Expert Group is organized in order to assist UNSD in its revision of the existing UN Statistical Commission's recommendations on distributive trade statistics. In this connection I would like to emphasize that the revision of the methodology of the distributive trade statistics is seen as a part of building an integrated economic statistics programme. This implies that revision of the conceptual frameworks, data sources and compilation methods of distributive trade statistics should be harmonized with the revisions currently underway or planned in the near future in other areas of basic economic statistics. The benefits of such an integrated approach will improve country's capability to produce data in the most cost effective way and, at the same time, to ensure maximum comparability and policy relevance of the economic statistics.

The Expert Group is envisaged as a forum to discuss the methodology, related technical issues and to exchange relevant experiences in alternative approaches. The Expert Group is expected to conduct two meetings – the first on 22-25 August 2005 and the second in mid 2007.

The purpose of the first meeting is to provide an assessment of the UN recommendations in view of the new developments, to advise on the areas where updating of the existing and/or developing of the new recommendations is needed, and to formulate initial proposals for such updating/revision. Based on the meeting's results and the follow-up consultations, UNSD will prepare the draft revised recommendations on distributive trade statistics and submit them to the second meeting of the Expert Group for review.

To achieve the meetings goals and to ensure that the agenda items are taken up effectively, we have invited countries from different regions and with different experiences, circumstances and needs. I would like to wish you fruitful deliberations and to express my conviction that all of you will contribute professionally and effectively to the success of the meeting.

Thank you.