



UNITED NATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION

**Joint GCC-STAT/UNSD Regional Workshop on International Merchandise Trade Statistics
Muscat, Oman, 7-10 February 2016**

Opening Statement

Regional Workshop on International Merchandise Trade Statistics

Jointly organized by GCC-STAT and UNSD

Muscat, Oman, February 2016

Stefan Schweinfest,
Director
United Nations Statistics Division

Dear:

HE Sabir Al Harbi, Director general, GCC-STAT;

HE Hamood bin Sangour bin Hashim Al Zadjali, Central Bank of Oman
Executive President;

Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Oman supervising Research and
Statistics

Dear colleagues,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to this workshop on the Joint GCC-STAT/UNSD Regional Workshop on International Merchandise Trade Statistics (IMTS). With eighteen trillion US dollars worth of goods in annual global international trading, we can appreciate the importance of IMTS for giving us a feel for the pulse of the world economy, monitoring trade policy and market research. Furthermore, it is estimated that the GCC region covers around 5.5% of global trade share and is the main exporter of commodities such as crude petroleum; natural gas; liquefied propane and butane; sulphur and unroasted iron pyrites; and stone, sand and gravel.

It is not surprising therefore that international merchandise trade statistics are always in a high demand and consequently all countries compile them to the best of their capability. In this regards, I like to draw your attention to UN 2030 Development Agenda and the importance of timely and more disaggregated trade statistics in monitoring some of the targets. And through improvements in technology, the data have become more easily available to users all over the globe. I am glad that the United Nations International Trade Statistics Database (UN Comtrade) has been able to play an instrumental role in this respect.

The impact of the financial crises on global trade flows highlighted the need for more short term trade statistics to analyze the global economy in a more timely manner. In this respect, detailed monthly trade data are needed and could be made available by many countries. UNSD therefore started the collection of monthly merchandise trade data in 2012. I am very grateful that many countries provided us already with their monthly data and we have been disseminating these data through UN Comtrade to the general public starting since 2013.

Today, UN Comtrade publishes monthly trade data for more than ninety countries, which are regularly used in news articles, research papers and other publications. We hope that all countries represented this week around the table could provide their monthly trade data to us on a regular basis, if you had not done so already.

Due to changes in trading practices, customs policies, information technology and the needs of policy makers, business community and general public, the international recommendations for International Merchandise Trade Statistics were revised in 2010. This week we will use the manual of *IMTS: Concepts and Definitions 2010* and also the revised *IMTS Compilers Manual*.

These manuals provide clarifications regarding the key concepts and new recommendations on institutional arrangements, data sources and data quality but also on linking trade and business statistics. For the compilation of high quality trade statistics we also recommend that the countries engage in bilateral and multilateral reconciliation exercises to address and reduce bilateral trade asymmetries.

Only a week ago, on 26-28 January 2016, a new UN expert group on international trade and economic globalization statistics came together in New York to start the preparation of a handbook on a system of extended international and global accounts. This handbook will integrate the economic, environmental and social dimensions of trade and globalization, and will address issues of micro-data linking of business and trade statistics. During the meeting, the experts underlined the importance of high quality international merchandise trade statistics, as one of main ingredients in the construction of the Trade in Value Added (TiVA) database.

The main goals of our workshop are thus to improve understanding of the international recommendations of IMTS, to discuss the implementation plans of countries and to share experiences in the IMTS compilation, especially in areas of data acquisition, compilation strategies, and dissemination. Furthermore, I am glad that a data quality framework and assessment is one of the objectives of the workshop. In order to achieve these goals, it is importance to establish well-functioning institutional arrangement with data providers, notably Customs Administration as customs declaration is the main source of trade data.

As mentioned, this workshop is jointly organized by GCC-STAT and UNSD. I am pleased that all of you accepted our invitation and came here to Muscat for four days of discussions. We thank GCC-STAT for hosting this workshop and for organizing it together with us. We also thank the Government of Oman for providing their support to this event as the host country. Finally, I would like to express my high appreciation to our colleagues from partner organizations: WCO, GCC Customs Union, and ECOWAS who will share their knowledge and experiences.

In conclusion, I would like to wish you fruitful deliberations and to express my appreciation of your professional contribution to this important meeting.

Thank you.