

Opening Statement of Mr. Stefan Schweinfest, Director of the United Nations Statistics Division

Dear Ms. Orayeva,

Dear Colleagues,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this Regional workshop on international trade statistics. Strengthening statistical capacity is at the heart of what my office, the United Nations Statistics Division, wants to achieve. We would like to support every national statistical system around the world to be able to deliver the requested and necessary official statistics to its policy makers for evidence-based decision making. I am therefore very pleased to know that we are bringing together this week in Ashgabat a group of official statisticians from the national statistical offices as well as from the central banks, customs offices and trade ministries to exchange knowledge and experiences on how to best collect and compile international trade statistics.

The workshop focuses on a specific (and important) part of economic statistics, namely on statistics of international trade in goods and in services. Within the context of the United Nations Statistical Commission, represented by the Chief Statisticians of developed and developing countries, have worked together diligently and meticulously to make sure that the current recommendations in the field of international trade statistics are fully aligned with the recommendations, the concepts and the definitions contained in the 2008 System of National Accounts as well as in the 6th edition of the Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Manual. And, in case of deviation in the concepts among

international recommendations, the guidelines to bridge those differences are developed, discussed and shared in various technical assistance fora, such as this regional workshop.

I think it is particularly important to review the current international recommendations and standards on international trade in goods and services statistics in this group bearing in mind that some of the countries present are just making preparation for or just in the first steps of implementing the recommendations and are not ready to provide data yet. But I am hopeful that after the workshop you will be more familiar with the international standards on trade statistics and the importance of producing timely, high quality trade statistics for policy makers in the global economy.

I would like to point out that your work is very important not only to produce international trade statistics, but to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This new agenda poses a lot of challenges for the global statistical community, meaning it is imperative to modernize the national (and global) statistical system, improve capacity and enhance cooperation between government entities. In particular, the national statistical offices play a key role in this process as they constitute the core of the national information systems. To make this happen, the governments, international organizations, businesses, academia and civil society shall join forces and work together.

In the coming years you will be requested to produce information on sustainable tourism in your country for three targets of the Sustainable Development Goals, or shortly SDGs, about what my colleagues will

further elaborate during the workshop while discussing the travel item in EBOPS 2010 and its relation to tourism statistics.

Dear colleagues,

In this opening statement, I would also like to take the opportunity to stress – very briefly – the relevance of international trade and tourism statistics as drivers of the economy and to point out how businesses nowadays operate on a global scale connecting many economies around the world. If we talk about trade, the discussion is no longer just a discussion about how we exchange transactions on a bilateral basis, but is more and more a discussion about how our economy fits with other economies into some global value chains. The discussion is no longer just about who our direct partners are before and after in the value chain, but also about those partners, who are at the beginning and at the end of the global value chains, and who may exercise a certain control over its processes.

Rapid technological advances in the past few decades in transport, computing and telecommunications, including the development of the internet and electronic commerce, have resulted in enterprises availing themselves of resources for production at more distant locations and have enabled them to serve ever wider markets. This trend towards globalization, reinforced by liberalization policies and the removal of regulatory obstacles to economic activities, has fuelled the steady growth of multinational enterprises, international investment and trade in goods and services. Better

communication and transport have also facilitated the movement of people for the purposes of tourism, migration, employment and trade.

In other words, trade has become global and complex. Trade in goods and services is an integral and very important part of the global operations of businesses.

All this brings me to the main goal of this workshop, namely to transfer knowledge and good practices which will help to improve the quality of official statistics on international trade in goods and services. The workshop strives to achieve this by (i) clarification and elaboration of a number of more difficult conceptual issues and (ii) identification of good practices in the implementation of the international recommendations. Further, the workshop tries to position the compilation in the context of a global statistical work not only with reference to such pillars as BPM6 and SNA 2008, but also to other related statistical guidelines, in particular those on Integrated Economic Statistics and on National quality assurance frameworks.

Dear colleagues,

This week all of you will be working together to improve the understanding of the above mentioned recommendations and to share experiences on how to implement them in your economies. The ultimate goal is to produce the highest quality of international trade statistics, which are relevant for the policy makers at home and which are also comparable at the regional and international levels.

I would like to express my thanks to our co-organizers, ECO Secretariat and UNESCAP for their provision and their continuous support and I am asking their continuous help to the countries in implementing the recommendations and to provide more detailed quality statistics on international trade statistics.

Let me also voice a special welcome to the international colleagues who came to Ashgabat by the invitation from my organization, the United Nations but would welcome the numerous participants from the different government entities in Turkmenistan and I hope that all of you will acquire new ideas for your work.

I would specifically thank our colleagues at the UNDP Turkmenistan office who supported the preparation of this workshop, providing logistic support and made the workshop possible in Ashgabat.

Last but not least, I would like to thank the host, the State Statistical Committee of Turkmenistan, particularly the president, Ms. Orayeva who took part of the preparation herself and made many initiatives in this preparation and pushed for their realization.

I wish you a successful workshop and soliciting your active participation in the work.

Thank you.