



**REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE STATISTICS**

26 September 2016, Ashgabat

**Opening statement**

Stefan Schweinfest

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Dear Ms. Orayeva,

Dear Colleagues,

My name is Stefan Schweinfest and I am the Director of the United Nations Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs at UN Headquarters in New York. It is my great pleasure to welcome you to this regional training workshop on international trade statistics in Ashgabat. I was very satisfied to learn that we have participants from all over Central Asia plus China and India, which means that you really cover a large part of world trade, when you discuss trade statistics this week.

First, I would like to thank Ms. Orayeva, President of the State Statistical Committee of Turkmenistan. She has actively supported the preparations of this event and these efforts are much appreciated. It shows how we - as a global community of official statisticians - can work together. It is at the core of my work to encourage international cooperation in strengthening official statistics, and it therefore heartens me to see that this cooperation is also happening in Turkmenistan and Central Asia.

I would like to further express my thanks to our co-organizers, the ECO Secretariat and UNESCAP for their continuous support. A special thank you goes to our colleagues of UNDP Turkmenistan. They have supported very actively the preparation of this workshop, provided logistical support and significantly contributed to make this workshop in Ashgabat possible. This is a great example of UN offices working together.

Dear Colleagues,

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 and the public at large for evidence-based decision making. To produce official statistics, especially international trade statistics, the national statistical office needs to cooperate with other government institutes. I am therefore very pleased to know that we are bringing together this week in Ashgabat not only participants from national statistical offices but also 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 this week focuses on statistics of international trade in goods and in services, and related business statistics. We will highlight relevant international recommendations in these areas, which were adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission in 2010. Those recommendations ensure that your trade statistics are comparable with the rest of the world and therefore relevant and of high quality for your bilateral and multi-lateral trade negotiations.

This is a good moment for me to invite and encourage you all to take part in the discussions of the Statistical Commission, since official statistics are continuously adapting themselves to new situations. The forthcoming session of the Commission will take place in the beginning of March 2017 and we will be discussing – among other topics – the ongoing work on improving international trade and economic globalization statistics. It is important to hear also the voices from Central Asia in the development of our statistical methodologies.

In this regard, I would like to take the opportunity to mention the main priority of work of the United Nations, namely the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This agenda was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, exactly one year ago. The implementation of this agenda is still the main topic of discussion in New York, and will be for the foreseeable future.

Within this context, the UN Statistical Commission was given the role to establish the indicators to monitor the progress on achieving the 17 sustainable development goals and its many targets. The Commission created a number of working groups in which China, India, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are actively participating.

In brief, the global community of official statistics is very active these days, and I therefore underline that your presence at the sessions of the Statistical Commission in New York is most welcome.

Dear Colleagues,

Let me conclude by stressing the relevance of international trade statistics as a driver of the economy and by pointing 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 global value chains. In other words, the discussion is no longer just about our bilateral trading partners, but also about those trading partners, who are at the beginning and at the end of the global value chains, and who may exercise a certain control over the trading processes. Trade in goods and services has become an integral and strategic part of the global operations of businesses. This has fuelled the steady growth of multi-national enterprises, of international investment and indeed the growth of international trade.

The main goals of this workshop are to transfer knowledge and good practices and to achieve this (i) by clarification and elaboration of a number of more difficult conceptual issues, (ii) by reminding us of the alignment of those concepts with the System of National Accounts 2008 and the Balance of Payments, and (iii) by identification of good practices in the implementation of the recommendations.

My colleagues Markie Muryawan and Karoly Kovacs will present the perspectives of international trade in goods and international trade in services, respectively. In recent years, we have consistently brought these two different but related sets of trade statistics together with the aim of presenting a consistent and coherent set of statistics of international trade in goods and services.

The ultimate goal is of course to produce the highest quality of international trade statistics, which are relevant for policy makers at home and which are also comparable at the regional and international levels.

I wish you a very active, fruitful and successful workshop,

Thank you very much.