

Conference on Climate Change, Development and Official Statistics in the Asia-Pacific Region

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Opening speech

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His Excellency Mr Byung Wook Lee, Vice Minister of Environment

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Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you on behalf of the United Nations to the Conference on Climate Change, Development and Official Statistics in the Asia-Pacific Region. Let me first express my gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Korea and, in particular, to the Korea National Statistical Office, for sponsoring and hosting this important event and collaborating in its joint organization.

Scientific evidence has elevated climate change high on the political agenda. The Fourth Assessment of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change left little doubt that climate change is a reality and that human activities are responsible for rising greenhouse gas emissions. Climate change has long term impacts on the environment and on our social and economic development, as our development depends critically on natural resources and ecosystem services.

Recent international developments such as the food crisis, the economic and financial crisis and the price fluctuations in the oil market have made it painfully evident that climate change and our social, economic and environmental well-being are closely

intertwined. As a consequence, policy actions on climate change and on development need to be formulated and analyzed in an integrated analytical framework.

It is a well known saying that we cannot manage what we cannot measure. We, the professional community of official statisticians have to respond to these new policy challenges at the national as well as at the global level by providing the necessary statistical measurement tools and, thus, support policy and decision making and inform the general public.

The role of official statistics in general, and even more so in the specific context of measuring climate change, is characterized by the following three major functions:

- Collect and disseminate high quality statistical data for the different types of users;
- Develop statistical standards, such as concepts, classifications, definitions, methods for data collection and analysis;
- Facilitate the integration of data and, thus, support integrated analysis.

These functions are closely related. In particular, adequate statistical standards are the backbone of an integrated statistical system.

In order for the professional statistical community to be able to respond to the challenges of measuring the driving forces, pressures, impacts and responses related to climate change we need to better understand the needs and requirements of the users of our data.

The user and producer communities have to engage in an effective dialogue to jointly address the following critical questions:

- What do we have to measure?
- What are the data and statistical tools that are already available?
- Are these data and tools adequate?
- Where is a need for improvement and adjustment?
- Where are the gaps?
- What are the new statistical challenges? and
- How can we address these challenges?

At this point, there exists already a wealth of information compiled by official statisticians on the population, the economy and the environment. These statistics provide the basis for the estimation of greenhouse gas emissions, for the development of scenarios and modeling, the assessment of impacts, of vulnerability and of adaptive and mitigation capacity. We also have developed some statistical standards and tools for integrated analysis, such as the framework for Environmental and Economic Accounting.

Yet, this is clearly not enough to face the current challenges.

This is why the United Nations Statistics Division took the initiative to convene the first conference on climate change and official statistics in April of this year in Oslo. The Oslo conference brought together for the first time producers and users of climate change related statistics. It was the first step in launching a dialogue among official statisticians, analysts and policy makers with a view to agree on a statistical framework which would assist countries to meet the information needs to support their national policies on climate change.

The Oslo conference was attended by about 120 participants representing 55 countries and 15 organizations and after a three day discussion it concluded with a set of recommendations. The conference confirmed that while climate change is a most pressing challenge, it has to be looked at in relation to other important environmental and development issues. Strategies to combat climate change have to be considered within the broader framework of sustainable development. Therefore the development of appropriate statistical tools to integrate social, economic and environmental information is crucial in this respect.

One of the main messages of the Oslo conference was that the human aspects of the impacts of and adaptation to climate change are very important in developing countries and that statistics describing these aspects have to be developed and integrated into the existing frameworks. Moreover, other important issues were identified, such as the

growing need for sub-national data as countries are increasingly looking at the right level to deploy funds; the need for timelier, more frequent (e.g. quarterly, seasonal) data and the need for geo-referenced and spatially disaggregated data.

The presentations and the discussions brought to light a long list of detailed data needs including e.g. the pressing need for better land use and land cover statistics, and the need for statistics to assess the mitigation potential of the different sectors. To meet these demands for more and new statistics, the National Statistical Offices will have to work in new ways, undertake new surveys and collect more data while, on the other hand, their resources are limited and they should not increase the response burden for data providers. There is, therefore, a fundamental need to prioritize, to determine where is the most pressing lack of data and where are 'the low hanging fruit' areas. It was agreed in Oslo, that an inventory of these needs has to be set up and that the related tasks have to be prioritized according to their urgency and feasibility.

To summarize, the conclusions and recommendations of the Oslo conference accomplished three things: (i) they defined the context in which official statistics should engage in climate change related statistics; (ii) they outlined the appropriate substantive areas for this engagement and (iii) they raised the question on how to govern the respective global process. However, these recommendations are only a starting point: It was agreed that the Oslo conclusions and recommendations should evolve into an agenda for action through a wide consultation process.

This is why we are here today: the objective of our conference here in Seoul is to further fine tune the Oslo recommendations and in particular review them in the context of the realities of the Asia-Pacific region. This is highly appropriate as this region represents the full scale of the challenges of climate change: it contains some of the countries with the highest greenhouse gas emissions but also countries that are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The mere size of the population and of the ecosystems, which are potentially affected, also distinguishes Asia-Pacific from other regions. According to the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies developing countries in this region offer

the most cost-effective opportunities for greenhouse gas mitigation and for integration of climate concerns into non-climate policies, such as the improvement of energy efficiency and energy diversification. The region also offers enormous opportunities for exploiting synergies between climate and other international regimes on biodiversity or desertification, for instance reversing unsustainable land use practices that lead to deforestation and degradation. Therefore, understanding the requirements for statistics to support policy and decision making in this region is very valuable in the process of shaping a global agenda for action for the official statistical community.

Our two day discussion will be organized around the areas for action as recommended by the Oslo conference and subsequent discussions at various relevant fora. These are grouped in three thematic sessions dealing with the measurement of the social, economic and environmental impacts of climate change, the related adaptation and mitigation measures and the data needs of greenhouse gas emission inventories. The thematic discussions will be structured in such a way, that first presentations will be made on the needs and requirements for statistics and, then, we will have examples of good practices how to satisfy those needs, both from the Asia-Pacific region and from other parts of the world. Relevant Oslo recommendations will also be presented in each session.

I would like to challenge you to critically review the experiences presented and the recommendations made against the background of your own individual country experience. Our expectation is that the combined national and regional expertise represented in this room will help us better assess the relevance and feasibility of the Oslo recommendations. The results of this conference will, then, feed into the discussion of a programme on climate change and official statistics at the global level, which is one of the main agenda items of the forthcoming session of the United Nations Statistical Commission in February 2009. I therefore, invite you to become part of our quest to mapping out a common way forward.

I look forward to our discussions here and I thank you again for coming here and being part of this important event.