

**United Nations Expert Group Meeting on the Scope and Content of Social Statistics**  
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United Nations, New York

## **Opening Statement**

by

**Paul Cheung**  
Director, United Nations Statistics Division

Dear Colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the Expert Group Meeting on the Scope and Content of Social Statistics. The following four days will offer a great opportunity to focus on an area of official statistics that poses many challenges both at the national and international levels. Developing best methods for quantifying social phenomena has been of primary importance to the United Nations for at least the past fifty years. More specifically, the United Nations Statistical Commission, as the apex entity of international official statistics has tasked us, the United Nations Statistics Division, to solicit your support, knowledge and experience in spearheading the Division's future work in this area.

Indeed, the social environment resembles a colorful and complex mosaic made of uneven pieces that come in all imaginable shapes. Furthermore, it is not a static mosaic; pieces interact and change places and colors, they grow, and may eventually retire but remain active. Developing accurate and meaningful ways for measuring the stocks and flows in various social concerns remains a key challenge among official statisticians.

In this meeting, we have a few expectations. The first expectation is related to laying down foundations for further work in the field of social statistics. In essence, for each social concern there needs to be an accompanying statistical data collection that requires relevant concepts and definitions, international standards, recommended topics, recommended tabulations, defined periodicity, and sources of data. The collected data

would also need to be disaggregated by population sub-groups (young, elderly, and women, to name a few) and by geographical levels.

Ultimately, we hope that each of the components of social statistics should be clearly and unambiguously described in terms of : (1) the social concern it addresses (e.g. health, housing, learning and education , etc.); (2) sources of statistics (administrative records, population and housing census, household surveys); (3) statistical data collection and its components (existence and applicability of international standards with respect to definitions and concepts, recommended topics, recommended tabulations, classifications, periodicity); (4) different population groups (elderly, young, women, men, minorities and so forth); and (5) geographical level of presentation of statistics. Such a framework, therefore, may be described as clusters of social statistics unified through common methodologies. We hope that this meeting will underscore the feasibility of such an approach in setting the scope and content of social statistics.

The second expectation of the meeting is to address the issue of an international action plan for improving social statistics, pertaining to areas that require additional work, as well as on related issues such as coordination among various agencies and institutions regarding social statistics at both the national and international levels. This draft action plan, if deemed necessary, would mandate the United Nations Statistics Division to continue conducting a thorough review and assessment of social statistics and point to the necessary developmental work on international standards.

The meeting is expected to provide critical input in developing this international plan of action by pointing out areas in need of international guidelines; emphasizing the value of training in social statistics; pointing to the need for documenting the roles and statistical activities of various international organizations, just to mention a few of the expected inputs.

Finally, the third expectation of the meeting is to discuss the draft terms of reference for the proposed city group, or some other organizational arrangement, such as a task force or friends of the chair, if the need for such an arrangement is clearly identified.

These three are just the core expectations; we hope that this meeting will send a strong message to the United Nations Statistical Commission and the international statistical community regarding the necessity to re-focus efforts on improving, fine-tuning and developing our instruments for capturing the wealth of social phenomena around us.

Let me conclude by expressing, once again, my appreciation for your participation and assuring you that my staff are committed to assisting you to make this meeting a success. I wish you a very productive and successful meeting.