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**First Meeting of the UN Committee of Experts on
Environmental-Economic Accounting
New York, 22-23 June 2006
United Nations Secretariat Building, Conference Room C**

OPENING STATEMENT

**Paul Cheung, Director
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Dear Colleagues,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the First Meeting of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting (UNCEEA). We met nine months ago and elected our chair, Walter Radermacher, agreed on the Terms of Reference of the Group, its long-term objectives, the work programme and governance structure. Since then, the United Nations Statistical Commission endorsed the TOR of the UNCEEA in November 2005 and endorsed at its 37th session in March 2007 its programme on work. A lot has been accomplished in these nine months and we have put in motion a process which we hope will result in placing environmental accounts and statistics in the realm of official statistics.

The Statistical Commission also “requested the Committee of Experts to refine its working relationship with the various groups responsible for the development of environmental, energy and related statistics.” The London Group has discussed in the past three days its governance structure and the relationship with the UNCEEA. I would like you to discuss in this forum the relationship among the various groups and establish clear division of labour so as to ensure coordination among the various players.

The update of the SEEA and its elevation to an international statistical standard by 2010 is undoubtedly a big challenge for the international statistical community that the UNCEEA has agreed to steer and direct. In this regard, it is of utmost importance that the various groups contribute towards this goal in unison. We need to capitalize on the present momentum, agree on a clear programme of work and established coordination mechanisms in order to ensure a successful take off of the update process. This is necessary to ensure the success of the final result.

As you can see from the persons who are present around the table, the UNCEEA is primarily a statistical body with experts from national statistical agencies and

international organizations. This deliberate choice on the composition of the UNCEEA is grounded on the consideration that the UNCEEA has been given the mandate by the UN Statistical Commission to take decisions on statistical matters and as such its members are statistical agencies. In addition, the UNCEEA is also fully committed to the objectives of promotion and implementation as outlined in its work programme. It is our belief that the dialogue with the users is better addressed in sub-groups of the UNCEEA. The User-Producer Conference on Water Accounting for Integrated Water Resource Management which was recently organized by UNSD under the auspices of the UNCEEA and hosted by Statistics Netherlands has shown that creating a mechanism to engage users and producers in the promotion and implementation of specific modules of the SEEA is very successful.

The User-producer Conference has demonstrated that the user community is prepared to embrace the environmental-economic accounting framework. The Conference has in fact endorsed the *Integrated Environmental-Economic Accounting for Water Resources*, commonly referred to as SEEAW, as THE hydrological-economic framework in support of Integrated Water Resource Management. Countries and international agencies in the Conference have expressed interest in implementing the SEEAW and a number of initiatives have been proposed. An interesting initiative is proposed by the UNESCO Institute for Hydrological Education, which provides training on water issues to hydrologists from all over the world. It has offered to develop a training module of two weeks as part of the programme of the Institute.

As a signal that the international community is ready to accept the environmental-economic accounting information system, Mr. Achim Steiner, the newly appointed Executive Director of UNEP, took office last week with a call to all nations to put the environment at the heart of economic policies. In his speech he says that “We have a chance to achieve the fundamental shift of values and reach a new understanding of what really makes the world go round. Until recently the goods and services provided by

nature have been paid only lip service by traditional economic accounting. Thus the land, the air, the biodiversity and the world's waters have been frequently treated as free and limitless". I am convinced that the SEEA can provide the underlined information system for designing these policies and the international community is ready to embrace it. The UNCEEA has a major role to play in promoting the framework and should take a proactive role.

In closing I would like to wish you success in the deliberations during the next two days and I am looking forward to the outcomes of this meeting.

Thank you for your attention.