

Opening Statement
By Paul Cheung, Director, UNSD
Fifth Meeting of the Advisory Expert Group on National Accounts
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Dear Colleagues,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the Fifth Meeting of the Advisory Expert Group on National Accounts. I want to thank you all for making time for this meeting and contributing in many different ways to its preparation.

This meeting signifies an important step in the improvement and implementation of a major international statistical standard, the System of National Accounts. It is also a milestone in the series of meetings held by the AEG in the process of the updating of the 1993 SNA. As you know, the first four AEG meetings concentrated on the discussion of the 44 issues, reaching consensus and developing recommendations on them. In this meeting, the AEG will turn its attention to review how those recommendations are reflected in specific chapters of the updated SNA, as well as to discuss its implementation strategy and long-term research agenda.

The promotion of international standards and, specifically, work on national accounts has always been high on the agenda of the Statistical Commission. Just two weeks ago we celebrated the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the Statistical Commission and we were proud to see at this year's session that over 134 countries and 32 international agencies, represented by their professional statisticians, joined the deliberations making

this meeting a truly global event. In its previous sessions and during the discussions this year, the Commission engaged itself in many substantive areas from population census to household surveys, from trade statistics to tourism statistics to national accounts just to mention a few examples of the broad range of topics covered. As a result, we are pleased to witness a general consensus developing among the Commission's members that work on statistical methodology in these and other areas expressed in the form of standards and guidelines have greatly improved the quality and comparability of official statistics.

It was in this context that the Statistical Commission devoted great attention to the progress report of the Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts on the status of the 1993 SNA update and the recommendations of the AEG on the 44 issues brought to it for adoption in a consolidated package. There was a long discussion with 35 interventions expressing overwhelming support for the set of recommendations, providing guidance for the work ahead to complete the drafting of the 1993 SNA Rev.1 and commenting on one or another aspect of the SNA update process. While the Commission was impressed with the quantity and quality of work that went into producing the set of recommendations and was satisfied with the achieved outcome, it also expressed concerns about the limited scope of implementation of national accounts in countries with less developed statistical systems and urged the ISWGNA to address this divide through a coordinated technical assistance program coordinated and led by the ISWGNA. It thanked the various actors for their joint efforts to move forward the update process, primarily the AEG, ISWGNA the Project Manager and the Editor and acknowledged the countries for their active participation in the global consultations. In

addition, I would like to emphasize the following specific actions taken by the Commission:

First of all, the Commission adopted the package of ISWGNA recommendations on the update of the 1993 SNA presented by the ISWGNA to the Commission as set out in the background document *Full Set of Consolidated Recommendations* with additional considerations on five issues as set out in the Report of the Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts in section III.C and III.D and its supplementary report. With their adoption the set of recommendations are officially recognized as the basis for the drafting of the chapters of the updated 1993 SNA.

On the drafting process, the Statistical Commission took note that the draft of the update of the 1993 SNA will be presented in two volumes. Volume one, to be submitted in 2008 to the Statistical Commission, comprising a full set of chapters that represents the SNA framework in terms of accounting conventions, the accounts, and the integration of the accounts and incorporating the adopted recommendations on the 44 issues; and volume two, comprising interpretations of the accounts and extensions such as satellite accounts to be submitted to the Statistical Commission in 2009. In consistency with this decision the AEG is requested to review at the present meeting chapters that form part of the planned volume one.

Among its decisions, the Commission also reiterated its request to the ISWGNA to submit a strategy for the implementation of the SNA to the Commission in 2008, based on regional consultations in 2007, reflecting user perspectives and taking into account the

different levels of SNA implementation across countries. As part of the implementation process, it underlined the importance of preparing handbooks and manuals with implementation guidance and to enhance capacity building through training and technical assistance. Therefore, the agenda of this AEG meeting includes the consideration of plans for the preparation of manuals by member organizations of the ISWGNA.

Another initiative supported by the Commission is the formation of a high-level group to examine long-term implications of SNA and possible future changes, taking into consideration rapid changes of the global economy; the need to balance users' needs, theory and the ability to collect primary data, the choice between imputed versus observable transactions, and the role of satellite accounts vis-à-vis the core accounts. Thus the Commission requested the ISWGNA to establish this high-level group and ensure a broad country representation in it. We look forward to the proposals coming from this group which could be linked to the topics on the long-term research agenda of national accounts that is another item of the agenda for the consideration of this AEG meeting.

In light of the above and considering the rich agenda of this AEG meeting, it is my hope that the present meeting of the AEG will assist us to make the initial steps for following through on several of the decisions made by the Statistical Commission. My colleagues of the ISWGNA and myself look forward to the AEG's advice on activities that are already in progress or need to be initiated to remain focused on the timely completion of

the updating of the 1993 SNA while planning for the work that will follow its publication.

I wish you a successful meeting.