1. At its 29th session in 1997, the United Nations Statistical Commission discussed the need to supplement the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics with a code of good practices, the main purpose of which would be to assist Heads of National Statistical Offices (NSOs) in their efforts to discharge their responsibilities.

2. At a meeting held in Prague in March 1998, the consensus was that, while a code of behavior would be too prescriptive given the diversity of circumstances, a collection of country experiences relating to the implementation of the Fundamental Principles was desirable.

3. The work was carried forward during a meeting in Singapore on 12-14 January 1999. The meeting had a broad geographic representation and included representatives from NSOs, central banks, and ministries of finance (see annex).

4. Following a review of the significance and historical context of the Fundamental Principles and of the conclusions reached in Prague, the group decided to focus on the development of two products--a document and a referral system. The purpose of these complementary products would be (i) to improve the understanding of the Fundamental Principles, (ii) to promote the awareness of the Fundamental Principles to a wide range of producers of official statistics, and (iii) to assist in the implementation of the Fundamental Principles.

5. It was agreed that there was a need for a concise document, which should be widely available both through the Internet and in conventional printed format. The document should clarify the Fundamental Principles, explain its objectives, and elaborate on its elements, using examples of country practices that implement the Fundamental Principles. The group

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suggested that particular experts from its ranks, with the help of a panel of friends, could start
the process with an initial draft drawing on existing material and the development of a
classification system required to link the contents of the document with the proposed referral
system. The group emphasized that the number of drafters should be small.

6. It was noted that the document should be addressed to NSOs as well as other providers of
official statistics. The group emphasized that consultative procedures should be put in place
to develop a document to reflect the needs of different countries and statistical agencies as
well as concerns of users. It was stressed that all providers of official statistics—e.g., NSOs,
central banks, and relevant ministries—should be brought into the process at an early stage. In
this connection, (i) UN regional commissions would play a critical role in insuring that NSO
views were obtained, (ii) the IMF Statistics Department, drawing on its wide range of
working relations, would play a critical role in insuring that central banks’ and finance
ministries’ views were obtained, and (iii) specialized agencies may be helpful.

7. The group recognized the impediments to the implementation of the Fundamental
Principles caused by the inability to have access to all materials in all official languages. It
emphasized the need for the document and the referral system to be in all UN official
languages.

8. The group recommended that the UNSD develop a framework for a website, including an
appropriate search engine, that would feature the document described above and serve as a
referral system for relevant country practices. This referral system could function both
electronically through hyperlinks to national websites and, conventionally, including
bibliographies and references to contact persons.

9. The Group recommended that the Statistical Commission, at its 30th session in March
1999, consider this report and instruct the Secretariat to proceed with its recommendations.
The group expressed the hope that the work would proceed so that the document could be
adopted at a subsequent session of the Statistical Commission.
ANNEX

WORKING SESSION ON BEST PRACTICES IN STATISTICS
SINGAPORE
JANUARY 12 – 14, 1999

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LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

1 HASAN ABU-LIBDEH
   President
   Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
   Palestine

2 O. O. AJAYI
   Director-General
   Federal Office of Statistics
   Nigeria

3 H. G. AKHNIOTIS
   Chief Senior Manager
   Economic Research and Management Services Division
   Central Bank of Cyprus
   Cyprus

4 AKBAR BIN ALI
   Deputy Chief Statistician
   Department of Statistics Malaysia
   Malaysia

5 A. DIAS BANDARANAIKE
   Deputy Director
   Economic Research Department
   Central Bank of Sri Lanka
   Sri Lanka

6 TEMUR BERIDZE
   Chairman
   State Department of Statistics
   Georgia

7 JEAN-LOUIS BODIN
   President - Elect
   International Statistical Institute

8 JAN BOVE
Assistant to the Director
Statistics Department
International Monetary Fund

9 MARCEL VAN DEN BROECKE
Director
International Statistical Institute

10 HEINRICH BRUENNGER
Head, Coordinating and Planning
Swiss Federal Statistical Office (SFSO)
Switzerland

11 PETER BUDAVARI
Director
Department for Analysis and Modelling
Ministry of Finance
Hungary

12 CAROL S. CARSON
Director
Statistics Department
International Monetary Fund

13 PAUL CHEUNG
Chief Statistician
Department of Statistics
Ministry of Trade and Industry
Singapore

14 JOHN CORNISH
Group Manager
Statistical Development Group
Statistics New Zealand
New Zealand

15 CH. DAVAASUREN
Chairman
National Statistical Office
Mongolia

16 WILLEM F. M. DE VRIES
Deputy Director- General
Statistics Netherlands
Netherlands

17 LAMINE DIOP
Director-General
AFRISTAT

18 VLADIMIR DRJUCHIN
Chief
Management and Technical Cooperation Services Section
Statistics Division
United Nations

19 ANDREW J. FLATT
   Director
   Statistics Division
   ESCAP

20 FREDDY GARRIDO
   Manager of Statistics
   Banco Central de Venezuela
   Venezuela

21 GUY GOODWIN
   Head
   Statistics Policy Unit
   Office for National Statistics
   United Kingdom

22 HERMANN HABERMANN
   Director
   Statistics Division
   Department of Economic and Social Affairs
   United Nations

23 FREDERICK W. H. HO
   Commissioner for Census and Statistics
   Census and Statistics Department
   Hong Kong SAR, China

24 REGINA C. JUINIO
   Bank Officer V
   Department of Economic Research
   Philippines

25 WALTRAUD MOORE
   Head International Relations
   Federal Statistical Office
   Germany

26 J.W. MUBIRU
   Ag. Commissioner for Statistics
   Statistics Department
   Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development
   Uganda

27 COLIN NAGLE
   Regional Director, Western Australia
   Australian Bureau of Statistics
   Australia
28 ENRIQUE ORDAZ
   Director, Short-term Statistics
   Instituto Nacional de Estadistica, Geografia e Informatica
   (INEGI)
   Mexico

29 EDVARD OUTRATA
   President
   Czech Statistical Office
   Czech Republic

30 JACOB RYTEN
   England

31 SIO SUAT KHENG
   Director (Co-ordination)
   Department of Statistics
   Ministry of Trade and Industry
   Singapore

32 SUGITO SUWITO
   Director-General
   Central Bureau of Statistics
   Indonesia

33 DIANNE WIGGINS
   Director
   Client & Statistical Services
   Australian Bureau of Statistics
   Australia