

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

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45th SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS STATISTICAL COMMISSION

New York, 4 March 2014

Madame Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

I am pleased to welcome you to the 45th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission. Many of you have travelled far, coming from your respective capitals to offer the United Nations your expertise in a true spirit of global cooperation.

It is precisely this focus on shared professional values, that has set the Statistical Commission apart during its now 68-years of history and has enabled it to achieve concrete results. You can proudly look back on a body of work, in the form of many global standards, norms and methodologies. These tools have ensured comparability of our data, have allowed our numbers to ‘communicate’ across borders, and to add-up regionally and globally.

On the basis of these fundamental tools the UN System has collected billions of development data, which tell the history of the past seven decades. During the 18 months of my tenure as Under Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs I have certainly come to appreciate your unique position in the UN system.

Nonetheless, continued excellence requires a continued effort and vigilance and, in particular, a continued quest for relevance. For your professional community, this means that the information systems you produce need to be able to continuously support national and global policy formulation and implementation. So, please allow me, first, to highlight for you the current United Nations policy priorities and then share with you some reflections on how your current agenda responds to these priorities, and what more can and needs to be done in the coming months and years.

In September 2014, the United Nations will organize its Third International Conference on Small Island Development States, for which I have the privilege of serving as Secretary General. In the same month the Secretary General has invited Heads of State and Government

along with business, finance, civil society and local leaders to a Climate Summit here in New York. And then there are of course the currently ongoing efforts of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development and of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing to formulate a new United Nations development agenda beyond 2015, with sustainable development at its core.

In all these areas statistics needs to play a central and critical role to inform and guide policy formulation and assist in the important task of monitoring agreed upon outcomes.

Distinguished delegates,

The Secretary General's High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda called for a data revolution in May last year. There are many ongoing discussions, on how this data revolution can actually and practically be materialized. I note with satisfaction that you dedicated a full day seminar last Friday to discuss this topic. Sustained and coordinated efforts will be needed to build and maintain statistical capacity in developing countries around the world, based on sound statistical institutions, infrastructure and operations. To put it simply: Sustainable Development will need to be supported by Sustainable Statistics!

I am convinced that the United Nations in general, and this body in particular, have a leading role to play in realising this data revolution.

Distinguished Delegates,

In response to Rio+20, this Commission created a "Friends of the Chair group" last year. This group is mandated to engage in an active dialogue with the policy community in the United Nations to ensure that a robust statistical measurement approach is incorporated in preparations for the post-2015 development agenda.

This group has worked very hard. It has organized an inter-active dialogue with the Open Working Group last December. It has also contributed to the substantive issue briefs of the Open Working Group. I would like to express our appreciation for the efforts of this Friends of Chair group under the leadership of France and India. I encourage you to continue with this important work.

This week provides a unique opportunity as the Statistical Commission and the Open Working Group are in session at the same time. I am confident, that many of you will seize this moment by engaging in a direct dialogue with your national policy counter-parts. This will certainly help to ensure that the post-2015 development agenda will be based on sound statistical fundamentals.

Distinguished delegates,

My opening remarks would not be complete without a word of congratulations on the recent endorsement of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics by the General Assembly. These Principles have guided your work as government statisticians around the world for the past

20 years. Their recognition, at the highest political level, provides an excellent opportunity to renew our efforts to fully implement the Principles and, thus, strengthen national statistical systems.

Distinguished delegates,

You have an ambitious programme before you. You will continue your work on the development of a framework for the integration of statistical and spatial information. Geospatial information is a rapidly developing field and many countries need support in linking it with statistics.

There are new topics on your agenda, such as big data and the development of a measurement framework for international trade and globalization, next to well established themes such as the implementation plans and strategies for national accounts, environmental-economic accounting and environment statistics. I also note that the Commission will consider a proposal to strengthen the coordination of statistical work within the UN System, which I of course very much welcome.

Moreover, I am pleased that this Commission will discuss the regional statistical development in Asia. I understand, that in addition to the official report, our colleagues from the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific have prepared a video, highlighting statistical accomplishments in that part of the world. Strong linkages between regional and global statistical programmes are indispensable.

Distinguished delegates,

As you set out on your comprehensive programme, I wish to ensure my Department's full support for the important work of this Commission. I thank my colleagues in the Statistics Division for their hard work throughout the year. I assure you that we remain committed to serving you with professionalism and dedication.

I wish you all the best for this session and for your future work.

Thank you.
