

Friday Seminar on Emerging Issues

Open data - adding value by matching access with privacy and security

3 March 2017

Opening remarks

Mr. Stefan Schweinfest, Director, United Nations Statistics Division

Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First, let me welcome you to the 2017 Friday Seminar on Emerging Issues. Today's event is held in the year when we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Statistical Commission. Along all those years, this apex body of the global statistical system has always kept its focus on new, relevant and innovative trends in statistics. While the Friday seminar is one of our younger traditions in the history of the Commission, this annual event has claimed a prominent place by creating a bridge between progressive, novel ideas and practices in statistics and the more traditional parliamentary function of the formal sessions of the Commission. It has also become a forum for chief statisticians of national, regional and international organizations to come together with a broad range of stakeholders sharing a common interest in the availability of official statistics that enable evidence-based decision-making.

Even more than the Friday Seminars of previous years, today's seminar on the theme "Open data" could not have been organized without the close involvement and interactions of civil society and private sector entities with the official statisticians' community. Open data initiatives build on the cooperation and are being undertaken as part of the commitment of governments, civil society and the corporate sector to add value to data by creating and maintaining data platforms that are easily accessible and belong to the public domain. The

advanced data storage and complex information technology capability required for the operation of open data platforms is dependent on the indispensable contributions of technology firms and data companies. We welcome their representatives at this forum and look forward to hearing their ideas as well as their concerns.

The fast technological progress in generating, storing, analyzing and disseminating data, accompanied with the digitization of our societies, gave rise to open data initiatives in many parts of the world to harness the potential of sharing data in an innovative technology framework and infrastructure. In addition to enhancing capacity and knowledge to produce high quality statistics, open data bring efficiency gains to the overall economy, are catalysts for expanding research and improving services to citizens.

As one of the important considerations for open data platforms, the issue of confidentiality and security of data will figure prominently on the agenda and in discussions of this event.

As we all are aware, open data platforms can only achieve public support and success if proper precautions are taken to protect the privacy of individual persons, business and civil society organizations and we manage to ensure that data generated by administrative, civil and business registers could be made public by matching access with strict ethical and security protocols and secure technology platforms.

The challenges and advantages of open data to official statistics have been discussed in various forums in past years, including here at the United Nations. Among precursors of today's seminar I would like to highlight the recent World Data Forum in Cape Town. The Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data encouraged national statistical offices to embrace open data initiatives and called for exploring the ways of

adjusting the Fundamental Principles of Statistics to include relevant and appropriate aspects of open data initiatives.

We have an ambitious and rich programme for today's seminar. UNSD, as the organizer is grateful for the assistance of Ms. Shaida Badiee, Co-Founder of Open Data Watch in sharing her profound knowledge of the open data community and initiatives and delivering the key note address for the Seminar. We also express our sincere thanks to Mr. Julio Santaella, President, National Institute of Statistics and Geography, Mexico, Ms. Teresa Dickinson, Deputy Government Statistician and Deputy Chief Executive, Statistics New Zealand and Ms. Haishan Fu, Director of Development Data Group, World Bank Group for accepting the role of moderator and the 15 speakers listed in the programme from national statistical offices, regional and international statistical organizations, private sector, academia and civil society partners. They will make presentations on four blocks of topics on Partnerships, Technology, Legislation and institutional environment, and on the core issue of Capacity building and resource mobilization.

I would like to invite all participants of today's forum to engage in discussions to take stock how countries around the world are progressing on open data and reflect on the presentations showcasing best practices. In a lively exchange of ideas and experience around various aspects of the emerging issue of the development and use of open data platforms, I trust that by the end of the day we will draw conclusions to guide our future joint efforts to utilize the potential of open data processes that we can take forward to the upcoming session of the Commission and beyond.

I wish you all a pleasant day of fruitful discussions and thank you again for coming.

With these thoughts, I give the floor to our dear friend Ms. Shaida Badiie to deliver the scene setting key note address of our Seminar.