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**49<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS STATISTICAL COMMISSION**

Agenda item 5: programme questions (United Nations Statistics Division)  
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**Programme statement**

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Dear Chair of the Statistical Commission,

Distinguished Delegates and Colleagues,

As we are all numbers people here, let's start with our favourite indicators (and no they have not been approved by the IAEG!):

- Number of participants in the 49<sup>th</sup> session of the UN Statistical Commission: 680 (plus of course the millions watching us on webcast!)
- Number of countries: 148
- Number of international agencies: 54
- Number of side events: 88
- Number of official documents and background documents considered: 79

We are a little bit down from our participant peak in the historical opening session of last year in the General Assembly, but all other numbers are exceptionally high. As the global statistical community, we have shown once again that we are a force to reckon with. I am always amazed at the energy level of this week, and I suspect that many of you, just like myself, are looking forward to a quiet and relaxing weekend.

It takes a lot of helping hands to put such a Commission session together: Funding for a number of participants from developing countries came from DFID and PARIS21; and looking at the wonderfully high number of developing countries in this room, we assume that additional bi-lateral or multi-lateral donors have enabled individual participants to come here. A cast of many prepared our 88 side events, including our feature events on Friday and Monday. Let me thank the hundreds who acted as chairs, moderators, presenters, discussants etc. Special thanks go also to the World Bank for organizing the exhibition on the 50-year jubilee of the ICP and for co-sponsoring our reception. Our substantive work this week is of course only the tip of the iceberg of all the continuous Commission work going on during the entire year: I think we will all be surprised next year when the Bureau presents its analytical work on just how vast the support network of the Statistical Commission is, consisting of

working groups, task teams, inter-agency groups, city groups etc. What that really means is that there are many dedicated professional colleagues from your offices around the world who spent countless hours to prepare the substantive reports which form the substantive backbone for our debates. Thanks to all of them: you make the Statistical Commission strong, vibrant and, in particular, relevant around the globe.

Dear colleagues,

Let me now turn more specifically to the programme of the UN Statistics Division. Our programme is of course governed by the budgetary decisions of the UN General Assembly and guided substantively by you – the UN Statistical Commission. We presented you last year our detailed list of over 500 outputs for our current biennium 2018/19. They consist of data publications, methodological publications, events, training materials. etc. We would normally present to you today a log-frame for the Biennium 2020/21, but as the United Nations is currently in a process of reform and considering a switch to annual budget cycles, the preparation of these planning tools has been delayed. In the coming months, I will be grateful for the support of the Bureau in this regard to review substantively our proposals, and I certainly expect to present our future planning framework in much more detail to you next year.

Our budgetary situation for the biennium 2018/19 is solid. I am pleased to report to you that despite generally difficult budgetary negotiations at the United Nations in December 2017, the budget of the Statistics Division has been maintained at the same level. In this context, I have experienced personally just how important it is to articulate clearly the value of our statistical work - and your support in this regard continues to be crucial.

Whilst our regular budget allows us to support a capacity building strategy that is built around transmitting knowledge through regional workshops, we need extrabudgetary support in order to engage in country level capacity building through pilot projects. Also, it is only through extrabudgetary resources that we can do research in newer areas and some of our innovative work. In this context, I would like to acknowledge a number of donors. We have, from China, a capacity building trust fund in statistics and in geospatial information. We have, from Australia, a disability trust fund that allowed us to relaunch our programme in that field. We have, from the UK Department for International Development, a programme on monitoring the sustainable development goals. We have, from UN Women, an EDGE project on gender statistics. We have, from the European Commission, an extensive project on Natural Capital Accounting and Valuation of Ecosystem Services. And we have grants from Eurostat on the transformative agenda, SEEA communication strategy and the revision of the Handbook on the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting, the latter also being supported by the UK. The World Bank is helping us with the 2020 world population and housing censuses and gender statistics. Japan and Ireland support the work of the IAEG-SDG and gender statistics; Australia supports our Big Data work. We also have our own UN resources from the Development Account, where we work very closely with the Regional Commissions and the UN Secretariat entities on a capacity building programme on Statistics for the SDGs; since the beginning of this year we also have additional work on geospatial information and migration statistics. And, last but not least, we have, of course, the critically important in-kind support that we get from many countries who are sending us an expert for free to help as a resource person in a

workshop or to contribute a chapter to a methodological publication. This is very much acknowledged. All this adds up! In 2017, we organized 55 workshops, meetings and seminars (more than 1 a week!) with a total of 3672 professionals from 114 countries trained. And we are proud to say that all of these efforts are making a difference around the world.

Dear colleagues, this takes me to the substantive details of our programme ahead.

The discussions this week have reconfirmed that the top 3 challenges at this point in time can perhaps best be articulated as follows:

- Build strong national statistical systems under the leadership of national statistical offices to support the implementation of the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Agenda;
- Integrate various information systems, such as official statistics, big data and geospatial information to create an information architecture that is ‘fit for purpose’; and
- Communicate effectively with many data stakeholders such as government, private sector, citizens, academia, media, civil society etc.

This requires all of us to adapt and modernize – and that includes of course our own UN Statistics Division. As we strive to turn UNSD into a modern and leading service centre of the global statistical system, I have recently made a proposal for the restructuring of the UN Statistics Division to our senior management, which is currently under review.

The key drivers of change are to (i) better respond to the changing policy environment (SDGs and other global political frameworks); (ii) reflect new mandates, such as in the field of geospatial information management; and (iii) make the division more modern and agile. At the centre of the new division structure are the three substantive pillars of our work programme, in synch with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda: economic, social and demographic, and environment. The Economic Statistics Branch will consolidate all our work in this area, including our extensive programme on International Trade Statistics. The Environmental Branch will be strengthened through the full integration of our work programme on Geospatial Information. These three core substantive branches will be supported and connected through two transversal branches, one focussing on Data Innovation and Capacity and one on Development Data and Outreach, which will include all our cross cutting data dissemination products, including of course our highly visible flagship publication of the annual SDG report. As soon as this design is approved by the UN Senior Management, I will of course communicate it to all of you, together with newly assigned responsibilities.

Dear colleagues,

With respect to the detailed programme in the many sectoral areas where UNSD is active, I am pleased to draw your attention to a visually attractive brochure, which my staff has prepared for you, and which you will find on our website. This brochure not only highlights on 16 concise pages our achievements in the past year in the various programmatic areas, it also describes our priorities for the year ahead. Moreover, the brochure also fulfils a quality criterium that is important to me: it has a human touch. You will see there a beautiful group photo of our proud but slightly exhausted UNSD staff, which was taken exactly one year ago in the General Assembly Hall right after the closure of our previous Statistical Commission

session. You will also find other pictures of “UNSD in action”, and you may even discover yourself in one of the workshop photos. This is, for me, an excellent opportunity to thank my most important collaborators: our UNSD colleagues. Conducting a series of internal consultations regarding the UNSD restructuring revealed to me, once again, the breadth and depth of knowledge and expertise available in the division; and what is even more valuable: it revealed the deep professionalism and dedication of my international civil servant colleagues. I truly and deeply appreciate all of their support, which you have also experienced this week in many forms.

Dear colleagues,

Before concluding, I would like to share one important concern with you that is dear to my heart: The global statistical system, as represented in this room, is indivisible. Yes, there are of course differences among us: some are representing more advanced statistical systems whilst others are still developing the basics; some national statistical offices are very big and others are small; and, yes, some here are representing international statistical programmes: and again, there are differences there too between regional and sectoral programmes and between more technical and more operational orientations. There is enough work to do for all of us, and we need the special perspective and expertise of everybody in this room. I personally love the metaphor of the ‘statistical family’ – yes, this includes a slightly weird cousin with a tattoo and the perennially grumpy great-uncle (I leave it up to you to decide who is who here.....), but at the end of the day there are the shared professional ethics and a joint purpose that bind us all together. At UNSD we’ll work tirelessly to bring and keep it all together!

And on this note, I am looking forward to seeing you, hopefully, all again at the next family reunion – the Second UN World Data Forum in Dubai in October, which will not only bring all of us together again, but will also be an opportunity to celebrate good data and statistics with many partners and friends.

Thank you for your attention and support.