

Welcoming Remarks by William Seltzer on the Occasion of the 50th Session of the United Nations Statistical Commission, March 5, 2019

Although I am disappointed that I cannot be with you in person at this event marking the 50th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission, I welcome the opportunity to extend my best wishes to all of you participating in this session, whether as delegates, observers, or staff.

While there are so many accomplishments in national and international statistics to which the Commission has initiated or lent critical support to over the decades, I would like to identify four areas of work that I consider particularly notable. These are: first, the System of National Accounts as a policy tool and as method of organizing economic statistics; second, methodological and practical support for Population and Housing Censuses, particularly in developing countries; third, social indicators again both as a policy tool and method of helping to organize social and related statistics; and finally, the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, which the Commission adopted at its 1994 session and which was subsequently endorsed by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2013/21 and the General Assembly itself at its Sixty-eighth session in 2014.

The international statistical community and the statistical services of the United Nations Member States can take great pride in each of these achievements. However, for me, the most important is the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. Unfortunately, when these Principles are ignored in one or another country at whatever stage of development, there is a grave danger that the outputs of the national statistical service will be distorted to serve short-term political ends.

Several of those associated with the adoption of the Fundamental Principles by the Commission in 1994 are participants in today's meeting, including Katherine K. Wallman and Hermann Habermann of the United States. In addition, I cannot let this moment pass, without also recalling the critical roles played by others over the years that led to Commission's action in 1994, including Jozef Olenski of Poland, who chaired the 1994 session of the Commission, Wim Begeer of the Netherlands, who chaired the 1993 session of the Commission, which gave the Fundamental Principles an initial consideration, and Jean-Louis Bodin of France, who participated in many sessions of the Commission, including the 1993 and 1994 sessions, and who also served as President of the International Statistical Institute. I am also pleased to observe the numerous follow-on activities related to the Fundamental Principles that the Commission has initiated in the 25 years since their initial adoption.

Let me close by again extending my best wishes to you all and my thanks to the current Director of the United Nations Statistical Division, Stefan Schweinfest, for organizing today's meeting and for carrying forward the work of the Division in support of the Commission.

Thank you.