STATISTICAL COMMISSION
Fifth session - 3 May 1950
Lake Success, New York

Item 6 (a) of the provisional agenda

THE APPLICATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD INDUSTRIAL CLASSIFICATION

1. The Statistical Commission at its fourth session requested a report on
comments received from Governments on the International Standard Industrial
Classification of All Economic Activities, and on the application of the
classification in practice in order to make the necessary additions or changes
in the future (E/1312, paragraph 109).

2. The International Standard Industrial Classification was re-issued in slightly
enlarged form as Statistical Papers, Series M, No. 4. A section entitled,
"Application of the Classification to Population Censuses" was added to the
original text to guide countries on the use of the International Standard
Industrial Classification in this field.

3. Communications received by the Statistical Office regarding the classification
consisted, firstly, of requests for advice on the place of individual activities
in the I.S.I.C. The Statistical Office has given advice, based on its
interpretation of the classification. When in doubt, the Office has consulted
members of the group of experts who drew up the classification.

4. Secondly, the communications have concerned problems raised in the conversion
of a national classification into the terms of the international classification.
Various countries have made such conversions during the last year. The United
States of America, the United Kingdom, and France have expressed their own groups
on the 3- or 4-digit level in terms of the I.S.I.C. Canada, on the other hand,
has brought out its own Industrial Classification Manual arranged according to the
I.S.I.C., in a classified list presenting the items under each class heading, as
well as in alphabetical form.

/5. The difficulties
E/CN.3/103
5. The difficulties reported in making these conversions arise largely from the fact that the details given in the I.S.I.C. are not sufficiently extensive to cover all cases with which countries have been confronted. In addition, the differences in the structure of national classifications as compared with the international classification sometimes prevented the simple substitution of group numbers because, while symbols of individual national industries are easily convertible, the compositions of groups in the two schemes may sometimes differ from each other so much that the elements of one national group appear under various group headings in the international scheme and vice versa.

6. The introduction of the new I.S.I.C. into tabulations of national statistical offices is, of course, still in an early stage. So far the Statistical Office is aware of only one example of actual publication, namely, the main results of the Danish Industrial Census of 1949, which have been rearranged in accordance with the international classification. In addition, Italy and Luxembourg have adopted classifications based on the I.S.I.C. for their index numbers of production and (in the case of Italy) industrial censuses.

7. The difficulties that have been encountered by countries in the application of the I.S.I.C. have emphasized the need for an index in which the component items of the classification would be listed alphabetically in the terms in which they are understood in each country. The Commission at its third session took note of the need for such an index, but recognized that its preparation would be a difficult and lengthy task. The Commission, therefore, felt that this work should be undertaken when opportunity permits. It does not appear that the Secretariat will be able to devote any part of its resources to the task of preparing an alphabetical index in the immediate future. In the meantime, however, it may be desirable to encourage each country which does not adopt the I.S.I.C. as a national standard, to prepare and transmit to the Secretariat a convertibility index by means of which the items of the national classification may be identified in the terms of the I.S.I.C., in addition to rearranging their statistical data in these terms.