

The United Nations Statistical Commission at 70 years

GUIDED BY 33 DISTINGUISHED CHAIRPERSONS



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United Nations
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DESA

The Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat is a vital interface between global policies in the economic, social and environmental spheres and national action. Its present work is guided by the universal, integrated and transformative 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, along with a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 associated targets adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 25 September 2015. The Department works in three main interlinked areas: (i) it compiles, generates and analyses a wide range of economic, social and environmental data and information, which helps UN Member States to review common challenges and to take stock of policy options; (ii) it facilitates the negotiations of Member States in many intergovernmental bodies on joint course of action to address ongoing or emerging global development challenges; and (iii) it advises interested Governments on the ways and means of translating policy frameworks developed in United Nations conferences and summits into programmes at the country level and, through technical assistance, helps build national capacities.

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FOREWORD

Since its creation in 1947 the UN Statistical Commission has connected us, statisticians from around the world, in pursuing the advancement of official statistics. It unites us in our common goal: promoting the development of statistical information as an essential instrument for development and as a substantive contribution to public policy and private action.

In addition to all the technical work that we have accomplished over the past 70 years, the Statistical Commission brings us together as a community like no other body or organization. It is where we find appreciation and support for the issues related to our daily work – big or small.

The work of the Statistical Commission, the highest decision making body for international statistical activities, is currently carried out by 24 members and more than 100 observers. For the past 70 years, the Commission has been guided in its work by its chairs: 33 chief statisticians from around the world who have served in this role with pride and gratitude.

These colleagues, who devoted their lives to building and improving official statistics, have not only carried out their duties as mandated but rather they have left a great personal impression on the Statistical Commission, “our” Commission, constantly reminding us that it is us who shape it.

Today I share with you my appreciation for the work and lives of these women and men, as well as my immense pride to be among them.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Wasmália Bivar". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Wasmália Bivar

*Chair, 47th Session of the
United Nations Statistical Commission
Rio de Janeiro, February 2017*





United Nations Statistical Commission

First Decade: 1947-1956

“It can be said that the goal of the Commission is to contribute to the efforts of the United Nations to organize the world for peace by furthering the creation of a world statistical system ...”

Report of the 3rd Session, 1948, para. 2

1st Session (Lake Success, 1947)

UN Photo

Stuart A. Rice,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

1946

Nuclear Session



Image courtesy of the American Statistical Association (undated)

STUART A. RICE (United States)

Founding Father of UNSC and UNSO

Stuart Arthur Rice (1889-1969) was one of the leading social scientists and statisticians of the United States. Almost single-handedly, he laid the foundation for the UN Statistical Commission and UN Statistical Office (UNSO, now UNSD). In 1933, he became chairman of the newly created Central Statistical Board in the Bureau of the Budget, which made him *de facto* chief statistician of the United States until he retired in 1955. Among his successors (albeit with different job titles) were Joseph Duncan and Katherine Wallman, who have both been chairs of the UN Statistical Commission, and Hermann Habermann, who became director of the UN Statistics Division.

Rice, born in Minnesota, attended the University of Washington in Seattle. After graduating from college he was active in local politics. He received his PhD in sociology (1924) at Columbia University and taught at different universities. His major work during that period was in the area of voting studies and survey research methods.

Rice was elected chair of the so-called nuclear session of the Statistical Commission held in May **1946** at Hunter College, New York, which made recommendations for the composition and terms of a permanent commission on statistics and for a statistical organisation within the United Nations. Mrs. Rice recalls¹ that one day her husband phoned her from New York saying that he had invited the whole Statistical Commission down to D.C. for a party. He asked his wife to make the necessary arrangements and then hung up. One of the problems Mrs. Rice was facing was that the Rice residence was in disarray because it was being painted; a 'detail' Rice must have overlooked. Nonetheless, the first Commission reception was a great success.

From 1945 onward, much of Rice's time and energy went into consultant services to foreign governments, including Japan, Korea and some Western European countries. He also served as president of the International Statistical Institute from 1947 to 1953. Throughout his career Rice promoted collaboration among the world's statisticians.

¹ Oral History Interview with Mrs. Stuart A. Rice; transcript in Harry S. Truman Library (Independence, Missouri)

Herbert Marshall,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

1947 and 1948

1st, 2nd and 3rd Sessions



UN Photo (1948)

HERBERT MARSHALL (Canada)

Canada's 'Statistical Tsar'

Herbert Marshall (1888-1977) chaired the first three official sessions of the Commission (January/February and August/September **1947** and **1948**). He was chief statistician of Canada, in his time referred to as Dominion Statistician, from 1945 until his retirement in 1956. He graduated from the University of Toronto in 1915, worked there as a staff member for two years, and then served in the military during the First World War. He began his 35-year career at the Dominion Bureau of Statistics in 1921 as a prices statistician. He was later responsible for the balance of international payments and Canadian-American investment flows. In 1942, he was appointed Assistant Dominion Statistician and in 1945 Dominion Statistician.

Marshall played a key role in putting the Conference of Commonwealth Statisticians on a firm footing. The first Conference had taken place in 1920. 15 years later the second Conference was convened in Canada. During the third Conference (Australia, 1951) Marshall became a key figure in ensuring more regular meetings thereafter. The Conference is currently held every 5 years.

Marshall was responsible for the creation of the Statistics Canada Building, also known as 'Building 3'. It is an imposing office building at Tunney's Pasture, where all of Statistics Canada's buildings are located, a Recognized Federal Heritage Building because of its great architectural and environmental value.

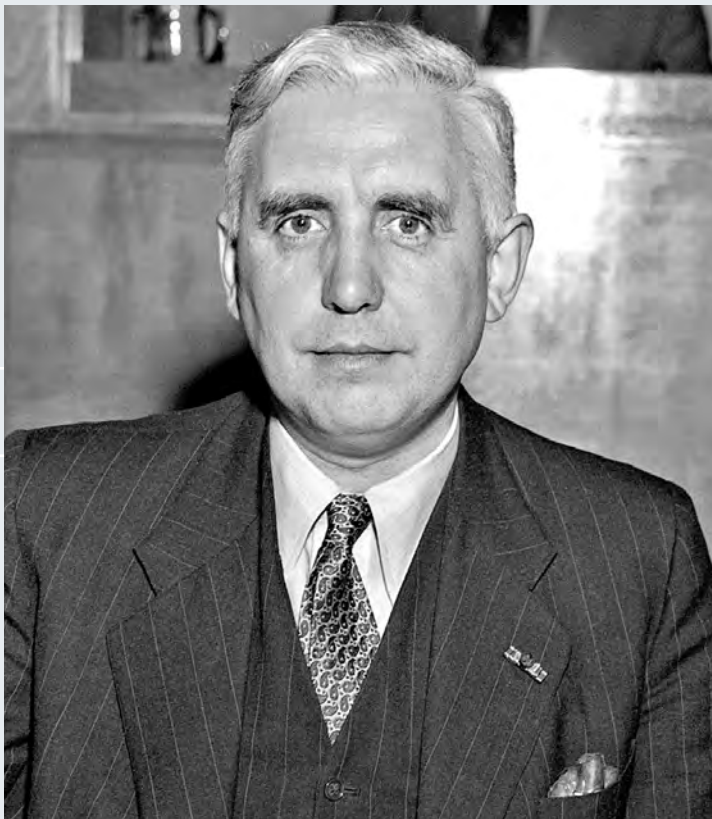
Marshall was a proponent of the centralization of statistics, which in Canada gradually happened throughout the 20th century. One of his first significant acts as Dominion Statistician was to strengthen the Bureau's mandate through the new Statistics Act of 1948. Marshall's steps to modernize and develop the Bureau's statistical programs quickly earned him the title of Canada's 'Statistical Tsar.'

Marshall was a life-long downhill ski enthusiast and president of the Ottawa Ski Club (now Camp Fortune) for many years until 1952. A few years later the Club named a popular hill after its former president and even today beginners can enjoy their first skiing adventure on 'Marshall Hill' at Camp Fortune.

Philip Idenburg,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

1949 and 1950

4th and 5th Sessions



UN Photo (1950)

PHILIP IDENBURG (Netherlands)²

Founding father of the Conference of European Statisticians

During his long career, Philippus Jacobus Idenburg (1901-1995) came within an inch of prestigious appointments: Minister of Education and Mayor of Amsterdam. For various (political) reasons others were ultimately chosen. He will mostly be remembered as one of the great names in Dutch official statistics, as well as in education policy. He started his career in 1924 at the Council of Evangelical Schools. In 1929 he moved to the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) as head of a new Department for Education Statistics. In 1939 he was appointed director-general. He worked at CBS until 1966, with a brief intermezzo in 1946, when he was director-general at the Ministry of Education. When a new Minister came in he returned to the CBS.

From 1934-1972, Idenburg taught history, theory and statistics of the Dutch school system at the University of Amsterdam. His *Overview* (1960) and his *Theory of Education Policy* (1971) are still regarded as landmark publications. The *Overview* is a thorough analysis of the Dutch education system. The *Theory* discusses education policy from many different viewpoints. In addition, Idenburg was active in other domains. He was editor of journals, including the Labour Party's journal *Socialism and Democracy*. Furthermore, he was involved in arts and literature and chaired the Dutch Arts Council, and the Dutch Film Institute/Film Academy.

Idenburg participated in the first regular session of the Statistical Commission in 1947, and was elected chair in **1949** and **1950**. In the Statistical Commission he advocated the creation of the Conference of European Statisticians; in March 1949 he was the chair of the First Regional Meeting of European Statisticians which was one of two ad hoc meetings held under the auspices of ECE and the Statistical Commission – the precursor to the Conference of European Statisticians. In addition to these, Idenburg also chaired the UN Committee on Classifications (1950) and the UNESCO Committee on Education Statistics (1948) and attended the UN Population Commission.

As a person, Idenburg was an old-fashioned gentleman: courteous, mild-mannered and well-spoken. To see him 'live', go to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ilq6EdSWOEI>.

² Based on "50 Years of the Conference of European Statisticians", United Nations, Geneva, 2003

Harry Campion,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

1951 and 1953

6th and 7th Sessions



UN Photo/MB (1951)

HARRY CAMPION (UK)

First director of the UN Statistics Office

Sir Harry Campion (1905-1996) became a key figure in the development of British official statistics after Winston Churchill appointed him as the first director of the Central Statistical Office (CSO) in 1941. Churchill's War Cabinet was plagued with incompatible and conflicting statistics produced by various ministries and the CSO was created to coordinate.

Campion was from Lancashire and had a degree in statistics from Manchester University. His first job was with the Cotton Trade Statistical Bureau. After a year in the United States (1932) on a Rockefeller Foundation scholarship, he returned to his alma mater to teach statistics. In 1939, he joined the Central Economic Intelligence Service, part of the War Cabinet Office. After 1941, working closely with Richard Stone, the CSO under Campion's leadership spent much of its efforts on developing national income accounts. The CSO was a small organization with only 10 professionals, and Campion has been characterized as modest and 'not an empire builder'. However, he made sure his people were the best in their field. He encouraged the development of macro-economic and financial statistics. Criticism about the lack of timeliness resulted in a great drive to speed up the development and publication of quarterly national income accounts.

After the Second World War, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) invited a number of prominent national statisticians, including Campion, to form a so-called nuclear Statistical Commission in 1946. Campion was also seconded to the United Nations to organise the new UN Statistical Office (UNSO, now UNSD). Later, he chaired the Statistical Commission in **1951** and **1953**.

Upon his death, Campion, a life-long bachelor, who lived with his sister, gave half of his estate to the Royal Statistical Society. The Manchester Statistical Society was also a beneficiary. Campion was fond of football and it is believed that he played for Bradford when he was young. He regularly lunched at the Reform Club where he had many acquaintances and friends.

P C Mahalanobis,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

1954 and 1956

8th and 9th Sessions



UN Photo (1948)

P C MAHALANOBIS (India)³

Doyen of the Statistical Commission

Professor Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis (1893-1972) is known as the doyen of the modern Indian Statistical System. Born into an academically oriented family he pursued his studies in the field of physics and completed his Tripos on the subject from Cambridge University in 1915 and later served as a professor of physics in Presidency College in Calcutta. His interest in statistics was sparked when he bought a complete set of *Biometrika* in Cambridge. He started reading on the boat on his way back to India.

His research on the application of statistical methods in anthropology, meteorology and biology are well known. He made pioneering contributions in statistical sampling in the area of demography, agriculture and other socio-economic fields. He was the founder of the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) and also the architect of the second five-year plan of India. He served as statistical adviser to the Cabinet in 1949 and was the driving force in establishing the National Sample Survey Organization and the Central Statistical Organization. He also distinguished himself in the field of art and literature. The Indian government honoured him with one of the highest awards, the Padma Vibhushan, in 1968 for his contribution to science and services.

Mahalanobis holds an unparalleled record of attending all the sessions of the Statistical Commission, from the so-called nuclear session in 1946 to the 16th Session in 1970. He served the Commission in various capacities, namely member, rapporteur, vice-chair and finally chair in 1954 and 1956. He made ground breaking contributions to the Commission during its formative years. The creation of the Sub-Commission on Statistical Sampling was his initiative. This Sub-Commission's final *Recommendations for the Preparation of Sample Survey Report* (1947) paved the way for the application of sample surveys in various fields of official statistics.

In 1972, at its 17th session, the Commission remembered Mahalanobis' "tremendous contributions to the Commission and to the statistical community at large" and in particular "his effectiveness in reconciling differences in the views between members of the Commission" in a unique Statistical Commission resolution. The Indian Statistical Institute will be organizing a year-long celebration of the 125th birth anniversary of Mahalanobis starting on 29th June 2017.

³ Based on: Rudra, Ashok. *Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis: A Biography*. Delhi: Oxford UP, 1996.



JAPAN



United Nations Statistical Commission

Second Decade: 1957-1966

“The Commission considered the technical co-operation programme in statistics to be of fundamental importance ...”

Report of the 13th Session, 1965, para. 14

*14th Session (Geneva, 1966)
UN Photo/ARA*

George Wood,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

1958

10th Session



Image courtesy of Graham Alexander Head (undated)

GEORGE WOOD (New Zealand)⁴

Towards more timeliness

Sir George Earnest Francis Wood (1900-1978) regretted not to have studied more maths. “This puts you too much in the hands of the Mathematical Statisticians – a quite crazy crew,” was his comment in a letter he wrote in 1971. He joined the Census and Statistics Department of New Zealand in 1921 shortly after graduating from Victoria University College. With the exception of acting as Government Statistician in Palestine from 1938-1945, he remained with the Department until his retirement 37 years later. Upon his return from Palestine to New Zealand in 1946, he became Government Statistician of New Zealand, a position he held until his retirement in 1958.

His was the pre-electronic era: except for a few tabulating machines introduced in the 1930s, most of the calculations were done by hand. The Department tried to get a computer in 1950 but was judged as not needing one. Wood also created the Consumer’s Price Index for New Zealand as it is still used today. He was internationally recognised for producing consumer price statistics in a timely fashion – generally within 10 days of the end of the quarter, compared to the four to five weeks needed in most other countries at the time. Under Wood’s leadership, the Department started producing population projections and introduced sampling methods to official statistics. In 1948 Wood successfully defended his department against being absorbed into the Treasury.

Wood was elected chair of the UN Statistical Commission in **1958**.

He has been described as a “very bright man with an enquiring mind, but very shy”. He enjoyed good relationships with staff at all levels, and had an active sense of humour. Wood was known as a liberal man who was very strict on professional ethics and avoided any semblance of political partiality in the output of the Department. Wood, a man of forthright views, was also known to leave comments on the margins of library books if he came across something he didn’t like.

Wood was chair of the New Zealand Consumer Institute after his retirement. He was knighted in 1975 in recognition of his public service.

⁴ Based on: Parkes, Kristeene. Sir George Ernest Francis Wood (1900-1978). in: *A History of Statistics in New Zealand* (edited and written by HS Roberts, 1999).

Donal McCarthy,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

1960 and 1962

11th and 12th Sessions



UN Photo/MB (1962)

DONAL McCARTHY (Ireland)⁵

Hurling statistician

Michael Donald McCarthy (1908-1980) was born in Midleton, County Cork. In Ireland, he is remembered as a leading statistician and academic, but also as an accomplished player of hurling and Gaelic football. Hurling is a game of ancient, even prehistoric Gaelic and Irish origins and has been played for 3,000 years. It is very different from, but shares some features with Gaelic football. Hurling is played with a wooden stick (called hurley) and a ball resembling those used in baseball. Gaelic football uses a ball resembling a regular football, which is advanced up the field with a combination of various techniques, not unlike in rugby. McCarthy played as a right wing-back of the senior team of University College Cork. His team crushed arch rivals University College Dublin more than once.

McCarthy went to the Christian Brothers' College in Midleton before later attending Rockwell College in Tipperary. He was awarded a first class honours degree in mathematics and mathematical physics at University College Cork in 1928 and an MSc in mathematical science in 1934. He got his PhD in statistics in 1938. In 1930 he joined the Statistics Branch of the Department of Industry and Commerce and in 1931 he moved to University College Cork as a lecturer in mathematics. He was appointed chair of Mathematical Physics in 1944.

McCarthy joined the newly established Central Statistics Office as deputy director in 1949 and became its director in 1957. He chaired the UN Statistical Commission in **1960** and **1962**. In 1966 he was appointed director of the Economic and Social Research Institute, Ireland's independent source of evidence for policy. It was established in 1960 by a group of senior academics and public servants, which persuaded the Ford Foundation to provide seed funding. McCarthy was appointed president of University College Cork in 1967. He retired on his 70th birthday in 1978.

⁵ Based on http://unstats.un.org/unsd/wsd/docs/Ireland_wsd_Former_DGs_bios.pdf.

Petter Jakob Bjerve,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

1965 and 1966

13th and 14th Sessions



Image courtesy of Olav Bjerve (approx. 1958)

PETTER JAKOB BJERVE (Norway)⁶

Advocate for analysis

Petter Jakob Bjerve (1913-2004) grew up as the youngest of 13 siblings on a farm in Stjørdal, Norway. As a student of economics at the University of Oslo, Bjerve worked closely with Professor Ragnar Frisch, in particular on developing national accounts in Norway before and during the Second World War. He became director of Statistics Norway in 1949 and maintained the position with a few breaks, notably to serve as Minister of Finance in the Norwegian government from 1960 to 1963, until he retired in 1980. Bjerve continued to publish work in his fields of interest until he was more than 85 years old.

Bjerve strongly believed in the importance of analytical work and once said “Numbers alone do not say much. Analysis is needed to get them to speak, to say something useful about society.” His conviction was so strong that he rejected the position as director of Statistics Norway three times until he was finally granted his wish to open a dedicated research institute within the organisation.

Bjerve left significant marks on the area of statistics in Norway and internationally, in particular by developing the first Norwegian national accounts. Under Bjerve’s leadership Statistics Norway also introduced personal identification numbers and company registration numbers as well as administrative registers based on these. He was an active participant in both the UN Statistical Commission and the UN Commission on Population and Development. He was elected chair of the Statistical Commission in **1965** and **1966** and later also president of the International Statistical Institute from 1971 to 1974. Bjerve was the main consultant for the 1980 issue of the *UN Handbook of Statistical Organization*.

Bjerve has been described as an enthusiastic, insightful and generous person. He held a fondness for gardening and sport fishing. His favourite salmon river was the Alta river in the Arctic part of Norway. He was also a master of building stone drywalls and received many compliments for the wall he built in his garden.

⁶ Based on *Obituary: Petter Jakob Bjerve* (J.R. Statist. Soc. A (2004), 167, Part 4, pp. 757-758) and *Portrait of Petter Jakob Bjerve* by Torbjørn Tjernsberg; <http://www.ssb.no/nasjonalregnskap-og-konjunkturer/artikler-og-publikasjoner/vi-maa-lytte-til-tala-si-tale> (accessed 25 January 2017).





United Nations Statistical Commission

Third Decade: 1967–1976

“If statistics are to be used on an international scale, they must so far as possible, be uniform in structure.”

– G. Jahn, Norway, member of the First Session, 1947

15th Session (New York, 1968)

UN Photo/Teddy Chen

Keith Archer,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

1968

15th Session



Image courtesy of the ABS collection, Commonwealth of Australia

KEITH ARCHER (Australia)

Talented Tasmanian

Keith McRae Archer (1905-1999) was born in Launceston, Tasmania. After finishing Launceston Grammar School he was appointed to the Tasmanian Statistics Office in 1923, where with part time study he completed his Diploma of Commerce at the University of Tasmania. In 1933, he and his wife moved to Canberra, where he had been offered a job at the Census Office: preparing the upcoming census. It was supposed to be a temporary appointment, but he never returned to Tasmania.

In 1940 he became personal assistant to Sir Stanley Carver, the Acting Commonwealth Statistician. In 1954 he was appointed Deputy Commonwealth Statistician. From 1956-1958 he presided over the integration of the States' statistical services and in 1962 he rose to the top job. As he had experience with data processing equipment (punch cards) since the 1933 census, it was only natural that Archer promoted the introduction of the first major computer installation of the Australian bureaucracy. Under his leadership the prestige of the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics (now the Australian Bureau of Statistics, ABS) rose. This was also reflected by Archer being elected to various international positions, including chair of the UN Statistical Commission in **1968**.

Archer had a remarkable memory for names, faces and details. Not only did he know practically all employees of the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics by name, but he would also have detailed conversations with them about their families and hobbies.

Tragically, Archer suffered a serious stroke in 1970 leading to his early retirement. He was in fact so ill that the *Canberra Times* had already prepared his obituary. But remarkably, with one side of his body paralyzed, Archer recovered so rapidly that a year later he became executive director of the Australian Association of Permanent Building Societies, a position he held until 1975. Later on he kept doing voluntary work for building societies and in committees. After 1984 he mainly focused on his hobby, gardening.

Jean Ripert,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

1970 and 1972

16th and 17th Sessions



UN Photo (1987)

JEAN RIPERT (France)

Statistician, environmentalist, diplomat

Jean Ripert (1922-2000) came from a farmer's family in the Département de l'Isère, in the French Alps. It was there, in the village of Mens, that in 2002 a street was named after him.

Ripert was trained as an agricultural engineer and economist at the Institut National Agronomique (Agro) in Versailles. After graduation, he served in the French occupation administration in Austria and Germany. Upon returning to France after the Second World War, he met Jean Monnet who had been appointed the first Commissioner of the Commissariat général du Plan, established by De Gaulle in 1946. Monnet played a major role in negotiations about the European Coal and Steel Community and Ripert was also involved.

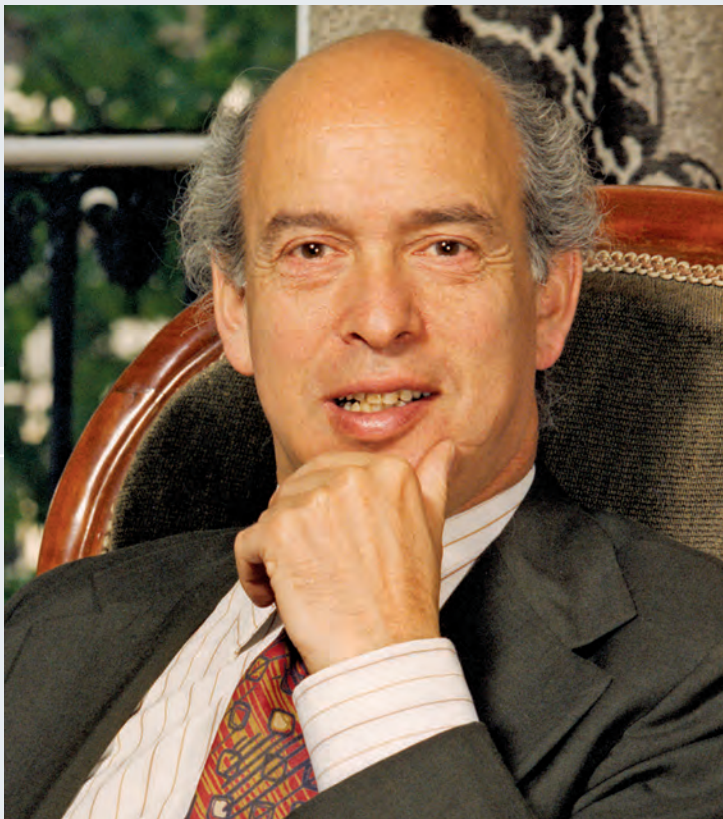
In 1963, Ripert was promoted to deputy commissioner and thereafter (1967) to director-general of the French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) a position he held until 1974. During this time, he chaired the 16th and 17th sessions of the UN Statistical Commission, both held at the Palais des Nations in Geneva in **1970** and **1972**, respectively. In 1978, Ripert started his international career as Under-Secretary-General at the United Nations, responsible for the Department for International Economic and Social Affairs (now the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, DESA). It was in this new capacity that he addressed the Commission again in 1979 and 1981 with welcoming remarks – this time at the UN Headquarters in New York. In 1991 he became the chairman of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for a Framework Convention on Climate Change, leading the negotiations for the *Framework Convention on Climate Change* and the *Convention on Biological Diversity* in preparation of the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit of 1992. Ripert returned to France, being appointed vice-president of the French Commission for Sustainable Development in 1995.

Ripert's son Jean-Maurice Ripert later followed in his father's 'international footsteps' serving as France's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva (2005-2007) and New York (2007-2009) and as the UN's Special Envoy for Assistance to Pakistan (2009 to 2011).

Claus Moser,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

1974

18th Session



©National Portrait Gallery, London (1977)

CLAUS MOSER (UK)

Opera statistica

At the beginning of the Second World War, Baron Claus Moser (1922-2015) was interned in a camp for ‘friendly enemy aliens’. He started counting and collecting information about fellow internees. It was there, where he found his vocation ‘to become a statistician’ as he told *The Guardian* in 2007: “I discovered a love of numbers”.

Moser was born in Berlin, into a musical family of Jewish bankers. In 1936 the family fled to Britain. Moser could have become a professional musician, but chose academia. After graduating from the London School of Economics (LSE) he became assistant lecturer in statistics and professor of social statistics. Moser left the LSE in 1967 to become director of the Central Statistical Office and head of the Government Statistical Service. During his tenure he implemented a major reorganisation of the service and developed modern social statistics. He had a special commitment to the communication of statistics to the widest audience. He created the *Social Trends Reports* in 1970, which was replicated around the world. The *Reports* used easy to understand words and graphs to convey the message accompanied by tables. Moser chaired the UN Statistical Commission in **1974** – this would be the last Commission session held at the Palais des Nations in Geneva.

When he left civil service in 1978, he became a banker, joining N M Rothschild and Sons. In 1984, he returned to academic life as warden of Wadham College, Oxford and later chancellor of the University of Keele, then Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University. Throughout his career he was a visiting professor at many universities in Britain and governor of the Institute of Technology in Haifa.

However, what gave him the greatest pleasure – among his 30-40 memberships of cultural and academic boards and committees – was being chairman of the Covent Garden Royal Opera House, an appointment he held from 1974-1987. He was an enemy of all that was philistine in Britain and believed that everyone should be able to enjoy high culture. He was knighted in 1973; in 2001 he was made a life peer with the title Baron Moser of Regent’s Park.

V R Rao,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

1976

19th Session



Image courtesy of V R Rao (approx. 1976)

V R RAO (India)

Pioneer of electronic data processing

Vakkalanka R. Rao (born 1920) was educated in Visakhapatnam, where he obtained a Master's Degree in mathematics and statistics in 1941 from Andhra University. After spending two years in the Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta, studying advanced statistical methods, he joined the Indian Statistical Service in 1945, where he worked until his retirement in 1978. Over three decades in the Indian Statistical Service, Rao served in many different capacities and made significant contribution to the development and promotion of the national statistical system of India.

In the mid-1950s, Rao was in charge of planning and conducting the first ever agriculture census of India. Over the course of his long career Rao subsequently served as director of Administrative Intelligence in the Ministry of Community Development (1959-66) and as director of the Computer Centre (1967-72), where he had the distinction of initiating electronic data processing for the first time in the work of Indian government organizations. Rao's last official position in India (1973-78) was director of the Central Statistical Organisation (CSO) and head of the Department of Statistics.

In **1976** Rao chaired the only ever session of the United Nations Statistical Commission held outside a UN duty station. The session was held in New Delhi following the invitation of the Government of India. It was, in fact, the last session held away from UN Headquarters in New York. In addition to a very full ten day long work programme, Rao vividly remembers the Commission delegates being received by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in Parliament House, and their visit to Agra to visit the Taj Mahal.

After retiring from government service, Rao joined the United Nations Secretariat first as technical adviser (1978-82) and thereafter as program coordinator (1983-87) for the National Household Survey Capability Program. In these positions he assisted developing countries across many regions in strengthening their statistical organizations through the planning and carrying out of household sample surveys.

After separation from the UN Secretariat in 1987, Rao continued his interest in the development of the Indian Statistical System. Rao lives in Hyderabad with his wife.





United Nations Statistical Commission

Fourth Decade: 1977–1986

“At the United Nations, the Statistical Commission has for almost 70 years led the global statistical system. Through its standards and guidelines, the Commission has created a language which enables us to communicate data and to share practical experiences globally. Today, the Commission stands ready to play a key role in developing and implementing a solid global measurement process for the Sustainable Development Goals.”

– Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon
on the occasion of World Statistics Day 2015

21st Session (New York, 1981)
UN Photo/Milton Grant

Mikhail
Antonovich Korolev,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

1979

20th Session



Image courtesy of the family of Mikhail Antonovich Korolev (1981)

MIKHAIL ANTONOVICH KOROLEV (USSR)

Pioneer of modern Soviet statistics

After spending his childhood and youth in different parts of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Antonovich Korolev (1931-2016) graduated from the Moscow Institute of People's Economy, worked there until 1956 and then moved on to the Moscow Institute of Economics and Statistics, a training centre for statisticians, where he was ultimately appointed Rector in 1966. At the age of 35, he had become the youngest professor of economics in the USSR. As a scientist he published more than 300 books and articles. He was a pioneer in developing new methods of computerised processing of economic data. He was fluent in English, which enabled him, in international meetings, to occasionally correct the interpreters when he thought they misinterpreted what had been said in Russian.

His career in official statistics began in 1972 as Deputy Head of the Central Statistical Board of the USSR; in 1985 he became the head of Goskomstat. After the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, he was chairman of the Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) for 17 years overseeing the transformation to a more open statistical system.

Korolev loved his country but had a lot of appreciation for the achievements of other countries. He enjoyed and promoted international cooperation. From 1974 onwards he was active in the Conference of European Statisticians, the International Statistical Institute and the UN Statistical Commission, where he was elected chair in **1979**.

Privately, he was a proficient chess-player. As a young man and member of the Azerbaijani team, he participated in the All-Union youth team championships. Later he also became an arbiter for chess tournaments. He was an avid amateur painter and poet, and keen on playing tennis. In Geneva he used to play against his 'neighbour' in the Conference of European Statisticians, Joe Duncan from the United States, who also happened to become his successor as Statistical Commission chair.

Joe Duncan,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

1981

21st Session



Image courtesy of Joe Duncan (1981)

JOE DUNCAN (United States)

Best voice

Joseph W. Duncan (born 1937), chair of the Statistical Commission in **1981**, had the best voice of all chairs. If necessary, he could have addressed the Commission without using a microphone.

Duncan holds a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering from Case Institute of Technology, a Master's of Business Administration from Harvard Business School, a special certificate from the London School of Economics and a PhD in economics and city planning from Ohio State University.

After studying international cooperation in science while in London, he joined Battelle Memorial Institute in Ohio as an economist, where he also served as director of the Urban Studies Center. Upon the request of the American Statistics Association and the Federal Statistics Users Conference he researched the controversy of statistical policy under President Nixon. His 1973 report *Maintaining the Professional Integrity of Federal Statistics* was followed by his appointment in 1974 as chief statistician of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). In this position he implemented guidance to assure statistical agencies were protected from political pressures and in response to a personal request from Vice-President Rockefeller, created the publication *STATUS*, a monthly chart book of social and economic trends.

Throughout his career Duncan has focused on developing better information systems to meet the statistical needs of governments and businesses. After leaving government service in 1981, he was the chief economist and chief statistician of Dun & Bradstreet until 1996. The author of over 400 articles, Duncan frequently has been a keynote speaker at conferences and business meetings. A common thread through his career has been the development of better data and sharper statistical analysis with clever graphics to better communicate the lesson to be learned.

Duncan's inspirations and joys came from his wife Janice, two sons, and four grandchildren. His passions include golf (as founding board officer of the Indian River Golf Foundation), tennis and fast cars – both as a driver and avid Formula 1 spectator.

Vera Nyitrai,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

1983

22nd Session



Image courtesy of the Hungarian CSO (1980s)

VERA NYITRAI (Hungary)

An accomplished trailblazer

Vera Nyitrai (1926-2011) was the first woman to chair the UN Statistical Commission in **1983**. A highly accomplished statistician and economist, she has written over two hundred studies and books and received several prestigious awards, including the Hungarian People's Republic State Prize (1988), Joseph Eötvös Wreath (2006) and the Achievements of the Hungarian Order of Merit of the Republic (2003) awards.

Already as a child she wanted to become a mathematician and later she studied at the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics of Peter Pázmány University in Hungary. After graduating in 1949 she joined the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (CSO) and thus started her lifelong marriage with statistics, culminating in her appointment as the president of the CSO in 1979. She contributed immensely to academic research, earning her PhD and academic doctor degree, on topics including industrial statistics, methodological problems of applied economics, and input-output tables. She also led work to incorporate statistics into the university curriculum, wrote and edited statistical textbooks on economic statistics and worked as a visiting professor at different universities.

Nyitrai served as vice-president of the Conference of European Statisticians; she was co-founder and chair of the International Association for Official Statistics (IAOS) and chair of the Statistical Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Science. She was committed to and played a leading role in international statistical work; however, as a perfectionist, despite her excellent knowledge of English, she often made self-mocking comments about her “Hungarian countryside-style” English accent.

After her retirement, Nyitrai worked at the Social Science Institute, and continued working as a special advisor to the president of the CSO. She continued teaching at different universities in Hungary. In her private life she was a devoted wife, mother and grandmother, who travelled and read a lot and had a wide cultural and literary appetite. In her last years she passionately played chess with her three beloved grandsons.

Tom Linehan,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

1985

23rd Session



Image courtesy of the Central Statistical Office of Ireland (2009)

TOM LINEHAN (Ireland)⁷

An Irish bard

Thomas P. Linehan (1926-2017) was the director of the Central Statistics Office (CSO) of Ireland for more than twenty four years (1966-1991); the longest serving director to date. He was educated at Christian Brothers' College, and at University College Cork, where Donal McCarthy – one of his predecessors as chair of the Statistical Commission – was his professor. Linehan was one of four people appointed to the post of statistician when the CSO was established in 1949.

Internationally very active, he will particularly be remembered as a great speaker. Whenever there was a celebration of some kind, everyone looked forward to the speech Tom Linehan would give. He had a great wit and a great gift with language. He also wrote various poems about statistics, such as:

*Though we don't know what we measure
We publish it with pleasure
And we hide our mortal terror
Of a quite substantial error.*

Linehan was very active internationally. He served as chair of the Conference of European Statisticians from 1979 to 1981. In **1985**, he was elected chair of the UN Statistical Commission. He participated in all twice-yearly meetings of the directors general of the National Statistical Institutes (DGINS) of the European Communities, from 1972 to 1990, and in the first three meetings of the Statistical Programme Committee, which took over the role of DGINS. In recognition of his contribution to European statistics he was presented the prestigious Schumann Medal by Yves Franchet, Director-General of Eurostat.

As the most senior ex-chair of the Conference of European Statisticians, he was also for many years known as the 'king maker', proposing for election to the Conference the chair and members of the Bureau.

Linehan passed away 10 January 2017.

⁷ Based on http://unstats.un.org/unsd/wsd/docs/Ireland_wsd_Former_DGs_bios.pdf.





United Nations Statistical Commission

Fifth Decade: 1987–1996

“Official statistics provide an indispensable element in the information system of a democratic society, serving the Government, the economy and the public with data about the economic, demographic, social and environmental situation....”

Principle 1 of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, adopted at the Special Session 1994

22nd Session (New York, 1983)

UN Photo/Yutaka Nagata

Emmanuel
Oti Boateng,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

1987

24th Session



Image courtesy of Emmanuel Oti Boateng (2016)

EMMANUEL OTI BOATENG (Ghana)

Traditional ruler and renowned scholar

Daasebre Professor (Emeritus) Emmanuel Oti Boateng (born 1940) holds a Bachelor of Science in economics from the University of Ghana, a Master of Science in statistics from the London School of Economics and Political Science and a Philosophy Doctorate in statistics from the University of Liverpool.

Boateng was enstooled in 1992 as Omanhene (Traditional King) of the New Juaben State of Ghana with the royal title of 'Daasebre' which means 'His Benevolence'. As traditional ruler he combines the dual roles of administration and adjudication, mobilizing his people for development and settling disputes among them.

From 1982 to 2000, Boateng served as government statistician of Ghana for the record period of nearly eighteen years. He was a member of the Statistical Commission from 1983 to 1998 and became the first African to be elected as chair of the Commission in **1987**. Secretariat staff remember Boateng as a modest person who sought advice from his fellow Bureau members and senior staff when he considered it appropriate but who also left no doubt that he was the chair. He conducted the Commission session with dignity and strength; demonstrating a concern for inclusiveness and completeness. In January 1993, Boateng was also elected the first African chairman of the International Conference of Labour Statisticians at its 15th Session in Geneva.

Boateng, who remembers mooted the idea of World Statistics Day during his chairmanship, was overjoyed when the United Nations General Assembly declared 20 October 2010 the first World Statistics Day and later decided that World Statistics Day would be celebrated every five years on the same day.

Boateng has held many distinguished positions and has received numerous national and international recognitions for his work. He has also been a member of the United Nations International Civil Service Commission since 2003.

Luis Alberto Beccaria,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

1989

25th Session



Image courtesy of ECLAC (2011)

LUIS ALBERTO BECCARIA (Argentina)

Statistician, academic, prolific writer

Luis Alberto Beccaria (born 1950) studied economics at the University of Buenos Aires, where he graduated in 1972. From 1975-1977 and from 1980-1981 he spent time at the University of Cambridge, where he earned his PhD in economics.

His long and varied career includes positions such as consultant of the Institute for Integration of Latin America (1973), the National Statistics and Censuses Institute (INDEC, 1973-1977), researcher at the Centre for Economic Studies of the Torcuato di Tella Institute (1978-1979), and manager of Economic Investigations of the National Development Bank. From 1984-1990 he was director of INDEC. Beccaria chaired the Statistical Commission in **1989** and vividly remembers the lively and intense discussions.

After leaving INDEC, Beccaria performed a wide range of consulting assignments, primarily in Latin America, for various organizations, including several assignments for the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), UNICEF (in Ecuador, Mexico and Argentina), UNFPA (poverty study at the national statistical office of Guatemala), the World Bank and UNICEF (Argentinian Ministry of Health), and the International Labour Organization. From 2008-2012, he was the director of the Statistics and Economic Projections Division of ECLAC.

In academia, he worked in various positions at the Economics Faculty of the University of Buenos Aires (UBA), including as department director (1994-1998), and at the University of General Sarmiento (Argentina), where he is a research officer. He also teaches at UBA Faculty of Law and Social Sciences, Latin American School of Social Sciences and other universities.

Beccaria is a prolific writer with broad interests and a long list of publications. Most of his papers and articles focus on economic and social statistics and socio-economic policy issues: the labour market, industrial policy, social protection, income distribution and inequality, poverty and the hidden economy. In addition he also has written about macro-economic topics, such as input-output-tables and national and regional accounts.

Beccaria is a big soccer fan; his favourite club is River Plate.

Willem Begeer,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

1991 and **1993**

26th and 27th Sessions



Image courtesy of Statistics Netherlands (1991)

WILLEM BEGEER (Netherlands)

Ardent supporter of the United Nations

Willem Begeer (1929-1999) was born in Gouda, into a humble, orthodox Protestant family. Owing to his talent for mathematics, he was accepted to the Erasmus University of Rotterdam (then Netherlands Economic University) to study economics, but he soon specialised in econometrics and statistics. He was director-general of the Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) from 1977-1991. Before he joined CBS, Begeer had for a long period been professor of statistics and for some years dean of the Economics Faculty of his *alma mater*. During his tenure at CBS, many important developments took place, in particular a revolution in information technology. Begeer gave much attention to the new CBS branch office in Heerlen, which had been established in the 1970s. He insisted on systematically mentioning Voorburg/Heerlen in all CBS publications.

Internationally he was active as chair of the Conference of European Statisticians (1987-1988) and the UN Statistical Commission in 1991 and 1993. He maintained close links with the International Statistical Institute and in 1985 the Netherlands hosted ISI's centennial conference in Amsterdam. For the United Nations he had great sympathy. He made a major contribution to international statistical cooperation by writing (jointly with Tom Griffin) a report for the UN about improvements in the functioning of the international statistical system, which is known as the *Begeer Report* (1992). On the other hand he was somewhat wary of the European Union.

Begeer had the reputation of being a 'tough character' and – in office affairs – a disciplinarian, making him sometimes difficult to get along with. While he hardly spoke any other foreign language, his English was decent. Nevertheless, George Als, long-time chief statistician of Luxembourg, a polyglot who even spoke Dutch, enjoyed annoying Begeer by addressing him in French. Those who came to know him more closely experienced that he was in fact a warm person with a strong social conscience. At the CBS he was, therefore, liked by all staff. Enjoying his retirement, he died unexpectedly, just a few weeks before his 70th birthday.

Jozef Oleński,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

1994

Special Session



Image courtesy of Jozef Oleński (approx. 2000)

JOZEF OLEŃSKI (Poland)

‘Spiritual father’ of the *Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics*

Jozef Oleński (born 1941) graduated in 1963 from the University of Warsaw and in 1969 he received his PhD in economics. From 1974-1991 he was deputy director and director of the Centre for Research and Development of the Polish Central Statistical Office (GUS). In 1992 he became president of that Office. This was during the period of transition for statistical systems towards international standards, professional independence of statistical offices, confidentiality of individual data and transparency of methods. Oleński was one of the first chief statisticians to fully understand the need for these developments. In the Conference of European Statisticians he was asked to lead the efforts towards drafting the *Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics*, adopted by the UN Economic Commission for Europe in 1992. Interestingly, Oleński chaired the Special Session of the UN Statistical Commission, which – after some tough debate – adopted the *Fundamental Principles* in **1994** at the global level. As a delegate he was known to participate actively in discussions, not shying away from controversial and sensitive issues.

After his dismissal from GUS in 1995, Oleński worked as advisor to the president of the Polish National Bank and as professor of economics. In 2006 he was re-appointed president of GUS. Under his second presidency, electronic questionnaires were introduced, and the Census of 2010 took place based on administrative records. Since leaving GUS in 2011, Oleński has continued his research and has participated in projects of the United Nations, the World Bank and the European Union, mainly in post-transition countries. As a researcher and statistical advisor, Oleński has written over 350 reports and publications with some published also in Russian, Estonian, Hungarian and Slovak. He has initiated work in new domains of official statistics like transborder statistics, statistics in fragile countries and statistics in small economies.

One of his lifelong interests has been the ‘right to statistical information’ and ‘quality of information environment’. His presentation on the *Quality of statistics in mass media in the global information society* at the IAOS conference ‘Statistics, Development and Human Rights’ (Montreux, 2000) stands out.

Bill McLennan,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

1995

28th Session



Image courtesy of Bill McLennan (1995)

BILL McLENNAN (UK)

A tale of two countries

William McLennan (born 1942) is one of the very few people to be chief statistician of two countries. He is the only Statistical Commission chair who chaired in service of one country (UK) while being a national of another country (Australia).

McLennan's career in government statistics spanned over 40 years. He started with the Commonwealth Bureau of Statistics (now the Australian Bureau of Statistics) as a statistics cadet in 1960 pursuing studies at the Australian National University, where he obtained a Bachelor's degree, with majors in economics, pure mathematics and statistics. Upon completion of his studies, he commenced work in the methodology area. He worked in a number of different areas and levels and was appointed Deputy Australian Statistician in 1986.

Although doubtful that the UK Government would ever appoint a foreigner to the post of director of its Central Statistics Office, he applied and was appointed the first non-UK citizen in this position. McLennan remembers that working in the UK was a productive and rewarding time. He particularly appreciated the high-level support he received, and enjoyed the interesting and sometimes challenging involvement he had with the European Union, where interpreters often had difficulties with his accent and usage of language. At the end of his three-year contract in the UK, McLennan was appointed Australian Statistician and returned to Australia in May 1995, two months after chairing the Statistical Commission as head of the UK delegation in **1995**.

He recalls that as chairman he paid particular attention to ensure that delegations from smaller and developing countries got a fair chance to express their views. Part of the UK delegation in 1995 was John Pullinger, who would become chair of the Commission twenty years later.

Since retiring in 2000, McLennan has undertaken consultancies in a many countries, particularly in Asia and Africa. His scariest adventure in Asia was when he barely escaped from Kyrgyzstan during the Tulip Revolution of 2005. McLennan enjoyed playing rugby and squash until his mid-40s; nowadays he plays golf with friends.





United Nations Statistical Commission

Sixth Decade: 1997–2006

“Without a coordinated effort to enhance and sustain statistical capability in many developing countries and countries with economies in transition, effective monitoring of progress towards national as well as internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, is being compromised.”

Economic and Social Council Resolution 2006/6

38th Session (New York, 2007)

Photo: UNSD/EG

Carlos Jarque,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

1997

29th Session



Image courtesy of Carlos Jarque (2016)

CARLOS JARQUE (Mexico)

Mobile statistician

Before his appointment as CEO of the global construction and citizen services conglomerate FCC in 2016, Carlos M. Jarque (born 1954) had been, since April 2013, executive director at América Móvil, responsible for Corporate, Government and International Relations. América Móvil is the second largest private telecommunications corporation in the world, headquartered in Mexico City. Few (former) chief statisticians have had a more varied career.

Jarque first graduated from Anahuac University, Mexico City (1976) with a bachelor's degree in actuarial science and finance. Then he received a postgraduate diploma in statistics and econometrics and a master's degree in economics from the London School of Economics, a postgraduate diploma in planning and economic policy from the University of Oslo, and finally a PhD in economics from the Australian National University (1981) and a post doctorate degree in economics from Harvard.

As director-general of statistics at the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), Jarque was the chief statistician of Mexico from 1983-1985 and president of INEGI from 1989-1999. Between his two appointments, Jarque was president of the Mexican Inter-Ministerial Committee of Public Finance Information and director of the International Statistical Institute (ISI) in Voorburg (the Netherlands).

Jarque left INEGI in 1999 to become Minister of Social Development of Mexico. In 2001, he moved to the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), where he was Secretary-General of IADB (2005-2007) and IADB Representative in Europe and chief advisor to the President (2008-2013).

In **1997**, Jarque was chair of the UN Statistical Commission. Jarque is the only Commission chair who also chaired a UN Regional Cartographic Conference in 1998. During Jarque's tenure, INEGI hosted various international events in Aguascalientes such as the biennial gathering of the International Association for Official Statistics (IAOS, 1998). The bullfight he arranged for attendees probably still holds the record for the largest number of statisticians in a bullring. Jarque has an unequalled capacity for remembering perfectly not only colleagues' names, but also the names and tales of their family members.

In 2015, Jarque was honoured by the International Statistical Institute with the Mahalanobis Award as "a rare statistician who has made signal contributions to methodology as well as practice of statistics."

Guest Charumbira,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

1999 and 2000

30th and 31st Sessions



Image courtesy of Guest Charumbira (2017)

GUEST CHARUMBIRA (Botswana)

In service of African statistics

Musaemura Guest Charumbira's (born 1951) career consists of continuous service to the development of African statistics. Born in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), he moved to Botswana in 1969 after finishing school, and obtained citizenship in 1971.

He joined the Central Statistics Office (CSO) of Botswana in 1970 as an enumerator. At the time the office was very small and in need of young people with an aptitude for mathematics. Charumbira took advantage and attended a ten-month training at the Eastern Africa Statistical Training Centre in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Later on, he attended a variety of other training programs and ultimately obtained a master's degree in social statistics at the University of Southampton in 1985.

Back in Africa, he was promoted to head the department in 1988, a position he held for 14 years until July 2002 when he took early retirement. At that time he had been made Government Statistician; the Department, now a semi-independent parastatal agency, had grown to be one of the best on the African continent. During his tenure, Charumbira participated in many international meetings, including the UN Statistical Commission, which he chaired in **1999** and **2000**. As chair, he excelled in dedication and charm. Charumbira fondly remembers his chairmanship as an exciting experience particularly as it came at a time when only one African before him had attained this honour: "It all felt like a dream at the time!"

Charumbira has been a great promotor of regional cooperation in Southern Africa. He was also a leading member of PARIS21. Since his retirement he has devoted his time to the development of official statistics in various African countries. This has included advisory work on the re-organisation of the Office of Chief Government Statistician in Zanzibar (Tanzania) and consultancy work for Expertise France (a French organization), where he assists with the planning and establishment of a fully-fledged statistical office for the African Union to be based in Tunisia.

In his spare time, Charumbira enjoys travelling, reading and gardening. He intends to pursue chicken farming on a small farm he is about to acquire.

Shigeru Kawasaki,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

2001

32nd Session



Image courtesy of Shigeru Kawasaki (2014)

SHIGERU KAWASAKI (Japan)

A humble chairman

Shigeru Kawasaki (born 1951) was born in Hiroshima, Japan, in the post-Second World War era, experiencing the 1964 Tokyo Summer Olympics and the move toward colour television as a child. During his high school years, he stayed in California for a year which gave him his first encounter with an intercultural environment.

He recognized the importance of reliable data for research and modelling when trying to make his own simulations based on the 1973 Club of Rome report entitled *The Limits to Growth*. He then developed a strong interest in the production of reliable statistics.

When working for the Statistics Bureau of Japan, Kawasaki was seconded to the United Nations Statistical Office (now UNSD) to work on the International Comparison Project from 1978 to 1981. He enjoyed this time in New York and appreciated visiting the cherry blossom gardens and experiencing many international cuisines. Kawasaki was elected chair of the Statistical Commission in **2001**, when he was director for Policy Coordination in the Cabinet Office of Japan. Having grown up in a Japanese society where being quiet and modest was considered the norm, his first words as chair well demonstrated his character and upbringing: he apologized to his colleagues for speaking to them 'from such an elevated position'. While serving as chair, he enjoyed working closely with former colleagues at the United Nations, and renewed friendships with them.

Kawasaki later became the director-general of the Statistics Bureau of Japan, serving in that position from 2007 to 2011. He also served as president of the International Association for Official Statistics from 2013 to 2015.

Kawasaki treasures his years of experience in official statistics, which taught him the value of international cooperation. Since official statistics are produced only within government and very often at a national level by National Statistical Offices, drawing upon experiences of counterparts is invaluable. He strongly believes that only through close international cooperation and active interactions among statisticians worldwide are official statistics able to develop and grow in the long term.

Tamás Mellár,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

2002 and **2003**

33rd and 34th Sessions



Image courtesy of the Hungarian CSO (approx. 2000)

TAMÁS MELLÁR (Hungary)

Prolific academic and public servant

Tamás Mellár (born 1954) served as chair of the Statistical Commission in **2002** and **2003**. He remembers his chairmanship as an exciting and demanding task during a time when the work of the Commission started to gain more and more political interest.

Mellár's career has mostly been academic. After graduating from Janus Pannonius University of Pécs (Hungary) with a degree in business administration in 1977, he began working as a lecturer for the Faculty of Economics in the same university, proceeding to earn a doctorate and become a professor afterwards. Following the collapse of the socialist regime, the Scientific Research Institute of Privatization appointed him director of the Institute, and in 1992 he worked in the Prime Minister's Office as a special advisor to the government. In 1994, he started working at the Budapest University of Economics.

In 1998, Mellár was appointed president of the Central Statistical Office (CSO) and served in this position until 2003. He continued his academic career during which he has authored more than a hundred scientific articles and five textbooks, and has served on several review boards, such as the Statistical Review. In addition to his academic endeavours, Mellár has been very active in public life: as a member of the Hungarian Democratic Forum, a newly established democratic party, as well as in his municipality, Pécs. Nowadays he is a member of the Economic and Legal Division of the Hungarian Academy of Science and also member of the National Committee, supervising the academic work of the Hungarian universities. Mellár is one of the leading outspoken Hungarian economists, appearing frequently in the Hungarian media.

He lives with his family not far from Pécs in beautiful country surroundings, and spends his free time on his favourite passions: winemaking and playing the piano.

Katherine Wallman,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

2004 and 2005

35th and 36th Sessions



Image courtesy of the American Statistical Association (2007)

KATHERINE WALLMAN (United States)

The ‘lady statistician’

Wallman (born 1943) served as chief statistician of the United States for nearly 25 years, retiring in January 2017. Prior to her appointment in 1993, she served as executive director of the Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics. In high school she was one of the few girls who excelled at mathematics. Disappointed in the increasingly theoretical math training, she ultimately majored in sociology at Wellesley College and eventually pursued a career in government statistics.

Wallman took great pride in representing her country in the international arena. In her early days in the global statistical system she was one of very few female chief statisticians. At her first Commission meeting she was recognized by the chair as “the lady statistician” – she took that as a compliment, and in the ensuing years noted with pleasure the steady growth of women’s participation in the leadership of the global statistical system. She recalls that it took her some time to adapt to the Commission’s modus operandi and ‘lingo’ but once she did she often needed a few days to return to normal office syntax, rather than the “diplomatic and flowery international language”. Wallman says she has always enjoyed listening to others’ views and “working with things that people have in common”. It was under her leadership that the ever-popular Newcomer Orientation Session for the Commission was introduced.

Wallman served as chair of the UN Statistical Commission in **2004** and **2005**. Even as she presided over the first-ever vote of the Commission, Wallman succeeded in defusing seemingly intractable issues by coupling her insights with charm, tact and a sense of humour – and on occasion by hosting colleagues for evenings filled with refreshment and conversation. A tireless advocate for making official statistics more accessible to the public, Wallman continues to champion efforts to enhance statistical literacy at all levels, from school children to government officials.

Wallman was elected chair of the Conference of European Statisticians from 2003 to 2007. She has been awarded several honours, including Presidential Meritorious Executive and the Population Association of America’s Excellence in Public Service Award. A recipient of the American Statistical Association’s Founders Award, she served in 1992 as the organization’s president.





United Nations Statistical Commission

Seventh Decade: 2007–2016

“Our collaboration and the defence of our common technical interests is something that distinguishes us and characterizes the prevailing spirit of the Statistical Commission.”

– Wasmália Bivar, Chair, 47th Session, closing remarks, 2016

46th Session (New York, 2015)

Photo: UNSD/EG

Gilberto Calvillo,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

2006 and 2007

37th and 38th Sessions



Image courtesy of Gilberto Calvillo (2008)

GILBERTO CALVILLO (Mexico)

Physicist, mathematician, statistician

Gilberto Calvillo Vives (born in 1945) obtained a bachelor's degree in physics and mathematics from the National Polytechnic Institute of Mexico, a master's degree in science, and a PhD in operations research from the University of Waterloo in Canada.

Before his career in official statistics, he worked for the central bank of Mexico for 30 years: first as mathematician in different projects related to statistics, optimization and computer science; then, as executive he managed the trust fund for exchange rate risk hedging, led the reform of payment systems in Mexico and coordinated the financial sector in the Y2K project.

From 2001-2008, Calvillo was the president of the National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics (INEGI). During his tenure, he received the mandate from the President of Mexico to promote the autonomy of the Institute. According to Calvillo, this was a difficult journey but by 2006 a constitutional amendment to grant autonomy to INEGI had been achieved; the amendment became effective in 2008.

He was elected chair of the UN Statistical Commission in **2006** and **2007**, when the Commission celebrated its 60th anniversary. Calvillo vividly remembers the “abundant material” that was generated by UNSD and other authors for each session. He also reminisces about interesting conversations in the hallways and in front of the “magnificent Chinese Great Wall tapestry”. Given his own institution's recent history, Calvillo says he was particularly interested in the topic of independence of national statistical offices from government, but also remembers well the paradigm shift of how to carry out a population census as a topic that stood out during his chairmanship. Calvillo remembers with some amusement that he “had to relearn the political geography of the world since countries and their names had changed dramatically from when he first learnt them in elementary school”.

Over his long career Calvillo was president of the Mexican Institute of Systems and Operations Research, and a founding president of the Mexican Committee for Electronic Commerce. Among his publications are a book and articles about linear programming, graph theory and its applications.

Pali Lehohla,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

2008 and 2009

39th and 40th Sessions



Image courtesy of Statistics South Africa (2011)

PALI LEHOHLA (South Africa)

Colourful interventions

Pali Lehohla (born 1957) has been Statistician General of South Africa since 2000 and was chair of the UN Statistical Commission in **2008** and **2009**. He is known for his yellow suits and colourful interventions, sometimes laced with African sayings and quotes from Shakespeare. As chair, he used to thank each speaker for their contribution in his/her own (UN) language.

Lehohla was born in Lesotho and moved to South Africa in 1982 taking citizenship in 1994. A graduate of the National University of Lesotho with a double major in statistics and economics, he did postgraduate studies in demography at the University of Ghana, which in 2012 honoured him as 'most influential personality'. In 2015 he was honoured with a doctor of commerce degree from Stellenbosch University for his contributions to enhancing Statistics South Africa's capacity and its development of human capital.

Lehohla is passionate about official statistics; he is a tireless advocate of the *Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics* and a strong believer in the technical and inclusive nature of the Commission's work. In his own words: "I have deep appreciation of the paradoxes that confront the statistics community at the national and supranational level and transcend these with tactical aggressiveness, persuasion and compromise to advance the interests and cause of official statistics". In 2006, he authored a statement on strengthening statistical capacity, which led to an Economic and Social Council resolution on this matter later that year.

From 2005 onwards he has been active internationally, including as member of the UN Secretary-General Independent Expert Advisory Group on Data Revolution and as chair of the Africa Symposium for Statistical Development. Focusing on conflict and post conflict environments, he was population advisor in Afghanistan, Cambodia, Iraq and Sudan. He was instrumental in having South Africa host the first UN World Data Forum in January 2017.

Lehohla is married with three sons. He loves music and enjoys dancing to mpaqanga: South African music with Zulu roots and the Kwasa-Kwasa rhythm. He is an avid reader of classical and history books, and likes watching football.

Ali bin Mahboob,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

2010 and **2011**

41st and 42nd Sessions



Image courtesy of Ali bin Mahboob (2016)

ALI BIN MAHBOOB (Oman)

Census, census, census

Ali bin Mahboob bin Hassan Al Raisi (born 1952) was elected chair of the UN Statistical Commission in **2010** and **2011**. He obtained his bachelor's degree in economics from Windom College, Vermont, USA in 1978. Later, he also obtained a high diploma in national accounts from the Department of Commerce (1985), Washington D.C. and a master's degree in management from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1996).

After graduation in 1978, bin Mahboob joined the National Statistical Directorate of Oman, holding various positions, including director of National Income and Production and director-general of National Statistics (Development Council). From 1994 to 2010, he served as the director-general of Social Statistics at the Ministry of National Economy. He concluded his service to the Sultanate of Oman as statistical adviser (2011-2012) at the Ministry of National Economy.

Bin Mahboob is currently a statistical adviser to the Department of Statistics and Community Development in the United Arab Emirates, where he assists in transforming data collection to internet- and call centre based operations and in preparations for a register-based 2020 census.

Bin Mahboob has been involved in three consecutive population censuses in the Sultanate of Oman: 1993, 2003 and 2010. During the latter he served as the Census director-general. Bin Mahboob has been on the forefront of introducing hand-held devices for censuses, most notably by using Personal Device Assistants (PDA) for the first time ever worldwide during the 2003 Oman Census. He also led a team that assessed damage to housing and private property resulting from Cyclone Gonu in 2007. Bin Mahboob was awarded the National Order for distinguished and life-long public service in statistics in Oman.

Bin Mahboob, a father of four, enjoys reading and learning about different cultures, customs, history and food while travelling. He says that travelling has made him love and respect people. He believes that "to be simple is to be great."

Gabriella Vukovich,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

2012 and **2013**

43rd and 44th Sessions



Image courtesy of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (2010)

GABRIELLA VUKOVICH (Hungary)

‘Statistical dynasty’

Gabriella Vukovich (born 1954), Dr., honorary professor and Doctor honoris causa of the University of Miskolc, has been the president of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (CSO) since 2010. Statistics has been present in her life from the start, as her father, George Vukovich, an internationally recognized demographer and statistician, had been working for more than four decades with the CSO and was appointed its president in 1990, a position he held until his retirement in 1995.

After obtaining her degree in law, Vukovich worked as a demographer at the Research Institute of Demography of the CSO and later at the United Nations in Geneva and New York. At the CSO she became head of the department responsible for the population census, then, between 1998 and 2004 the deputy-president for social statistics. Following a brief intermezzo as manager of the DEMO-STAT statistical consulting company she was appointed president of the CSO in 2010.

In **2012** and **2013** she was elected chair of the UN Statistical Commission and also assumed the function of acting chair in 2014. Her term coincided with the heated and politically fuelled negotiation process that later successfully concluded with the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals: a process that required from her professionalism, diplomacy, and a good sense of humour. However, to her, the most unforgettable event was when Hungary presented the *Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics* to the General Assembly for adoption in 2014, as her father had been a member of the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) when the original set of Principles was adopted by the CES in 1992.

As president of the CSO, Vukovich is committed to the development and improvement of official statistics. She plays an active leadership role in international statistical work both at the European and global level.

She likes to spend the rare hours of her free time away from the hustle and bustle of the capital in her country home with her large family of four generations, listening to classical music and engaging in the family’s burgeoning organic farming business.

Jil Matheson,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

2014

45th Session



Image courtesy of the UK Statistics Authority (approx. 2013)

JIL MATHESON (UK)

Undaunted Dame

Jil Matheson (born 1953) became the fourth woman and fourth chief statistician from the United Kingdom to chair the UN Statistical Commission during its 45th session in **2014**.

Matheson started her career as a social researcher at the UK's Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) in 1975. Over the next almost 40 years, she witnessed a major shift in the organization and purpose of UK official statistics. From the Rayner Review in the 1980s, which put official statistics strictly under the purview of Government, to the creation of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in 1996, an independent non-ministerial department. During this time, she managed a number of landmark social surveys, led the work on the *National Statistics Code of Practice* and eventually she was appointed National Statistician in 2009, leading the ONS and the Government Statistical Service (GSS).

In her regular blogs to the GSS, she would write about current issues and events affecting official statistics in the UK and elsewhere but also made time to chart the ups and downs of supporting Derby County Football Club as well as the latest tours she had taken on her motorbike.

On chairing the 45th session of the Commission, Matheson still feels great pride at the trust placed in her by the global statistical community. Her aim as the chair was for delegates to not only focus on the importance of the discussions, but also be engaged by the dialogue, debate and breadth of opinion. In that sense she led the Commission with humour and her own enthusiastic use of the gavel: “that’s one of the tools of the trade that I shall enjoy using this week. I am sure.” In her closing statement to the Commission, she revealed she would retire that summer and that she was looking forward to travelling the world and watching cricket, “a very statistical sport”.

Later that year, she was appointed Dame Commander of the Order of the Bath (DCB) in the Queen’s birthday honours list in recognition of her services to government statistics.

John Pullinger,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

2015

46th Session



Image courtesy of the UK Statistics Authority (2015)

JOHN PULLINGER (UK)

Statistician, librarian, statistician

John James Pullinger (born 1959) was educated at Alleyn's School, Dulwich (London), the University of Exeter and later Harvard Business School. He has been awarded honorary degrees by the University of Exeter and the University of Essex for outstanding achievements in the field of statistics.

John started his career as assistant statistician at the Department of Trade and Industry. He then moved to the Department of the Environment, responsible for statistics on local government revenues and later to the Office of Manpower Economics, heading the pay research team. In the 1990s he worked at the Central Statistical Office, where he became one of Bill McLennan's principal advisors.

As director of Policy and Planning at the Central Statistical Office, Pullinger led the creation of the Office for National Statistics (ONS). He rose to director of Social Statistics in 1997. As a member of the ONS management board he was actively involved in the improvement of statistical governance.

In 2004, he made a remarkable career move and became the director-general of Information Services and the 14th Librarian of the House of Commons, a position he held for ten years. His passion there was for parliamentary education – helping Members of Parliament understand the complex issues before them and leading work to connect Parliament with the public.

Pullinger remained active in the Royal Statistical Society serving as its president from 2013-2014. In 2014, he was appointed to replace Jil Matheson as the UK national statistician, head of the Government Statistical Service (GSS), and chief executive of the UK Statistics Authority. In **2015**, he also succeeded Matheson as chairman of the UN Statistical Commission. Pullinger was the first Statistical Commission chair to address the UN General Assembly. He briefed delegates on the process and progress of the development of the global indicator framework in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

As well as enjoying family life with his wife, children and grandchildren, Pullinger has since 1999 been chair of Great Culverden Park Ltd., and spends his spare time getting his hands dirty in the woodlands and parks.

Wasmália Bivar,
Chair,
United Nations
Statistical Commission

2016

47th Session



Image courtesy of the IBGE collection (2016)

WASMÁLIA BIVAR (Brazil)

First female president of IBGE

Wasmália Socorro Barata Bivar (born 1959) chaired the 47th session of the Statistical Commission in **2016**. She presided over the historic agreement on the global indicator framework for measuring progress towards the Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Bivar stated that “to all those who work with official statistics, the Statistical Commission is the guide of our national and also professional activities. Being the Commission’s chairperson is a great honour. Representing this community and its mission fills me with pride.”

Bivar is also proud to be the first woman to become president of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), achieving the third longest presidency (2011-2016).

After graduating in economics (1983) at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, Bivar started as a researcher at IBGE in 1986. Later she worked in various other positions, including in the Department of Industry, where she rose to head of the Planning Department and head of Analysis and Methodology. She later moved to National Accounts. In 1996 she obtained a PhD in economics from Luigi Bocconi University in Italy. From 2004 to 2011, she held the position of director of Surveys at IBGE.

Under her leadership, IBGE completed a revision of the national accounts system, as well as the preparation of environmental accounts and a revision of the household surveys system. In addition, IBGE’s communication policies were enhanced, including providing interaction through intranet between active and retired IBGE staff members across Brazil. The creation of a doctorate in the National School of Statistical Sciences, which is linked to IBGE, was another institutional achievement.

Bivar’s hobbies include cooking, going to the movies and travelling. She is an avid reader of non-fiction as well as detective stories and thrillers. She loves to go out with her family, particularly with her daughter, enjoying simple pleasures such as having an ice cream to cool down from the tropical heat of Rio de Janeiro.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

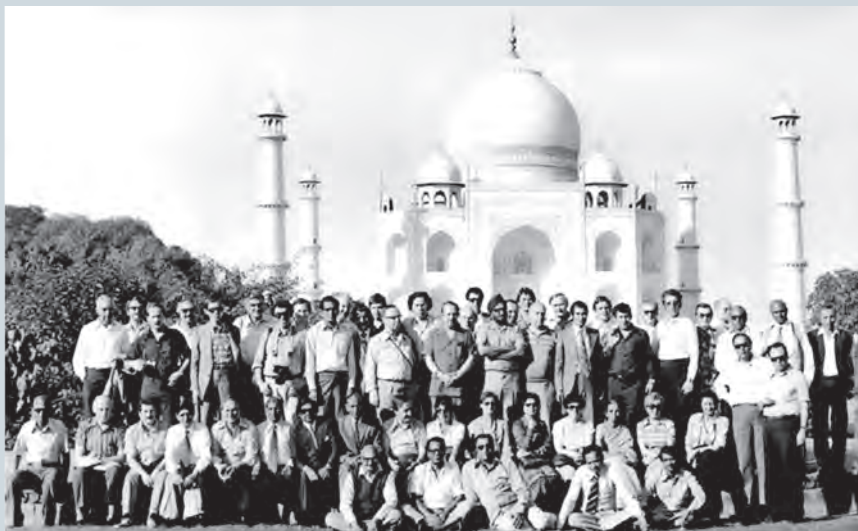
This booklet was prepared by current and former staff of the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in recognition of the 33 women and men who, over the past 70 years, have guided the meetings of this unique intergovernmental body, the Statistical Commission, and with their leadership have also provided a compass for the work of UNSD and its staff in servicing the global statistical community.

Thanks go to Eszter Horvath, Ian Rutherford, Karoly Kovacs, Kenneth Iversen Leonardo Souza, Luba Zeifman, Marcus Newbury, Raj Mitra, Richard Roberts, Sabine Warschburger, Willem de Vries and Yacob Zewoldi for compiling this booklet. Special thanks must go to Willem de Vries, who researched and authored more than half of the stories in this booklet, and without whose enthusiasm and tireless writing this booklet would not exist. Anu Chimata and Li Wang assisted with researching many photos and facts. Many more colleagues contributed to the fact-checking and proofreading. Heather Page, Ian Rutherford and Sabine Warschburger provided final editing. Sabine Warschburger coordinated the work on this booklet from its conception to final print.

UNSD would also like to thank the chairs of the Statistical Commission and colleagues from national statistical offices around the world for their patience in responding to our numerous questions. Their support made this booklet possible.

Finally, the 'stories' in this booklet have been researched to the best of our knowledge. They provide a small glimpse into the life and accomplishments of these 33 exceptional women and men and this will hopefully encourage our readers to learn more about each one of them.

In appreciation of the 33 women and men who, over the past 70 years, have guided the meetings of the United Nations Statistical Commission. Their leadership has provided a compass for the global statistical community and for the work of the staff of the Statistics Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.



19th Session participants at the Taj Mahal (India, 1976).

Image courtesy of the family of M.A. Korolev