INTERNATIONAL STANDARD CLASSIFICATION OF OCCUPATIONS
(Memorandum prepared by the International Labour Office)

1. Significant progress has been made in the development of the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) since the last meeting of the Statistical Commission. It is now clear that a final draft of the classification, consisting of major, minor and unit (i.e. three digit) groups can be presented to the Ninth International Conference of Labour Statisticians, which is expected to meet in the spring of 1957. Action by that group will make it possible for countries to take the classification into account in formulating their plans for population censuses in and around 1960.

2. The continuing development of ISCO during the past two years has resulted from the work of many statisticians, some of whom have given help repeatedly. The following paragraphs review the major phases of the development of the classification since early 1954.

3. In the spring of 1954 a draft of ISCO along with explanatory material was circulated to governments and to interested individuals for review. Many valuable comments and suggestions were received which were helpful in the preparation of a final report for the Eighth International Conference of Labour Statisticians which met from 23 November to 3 December 1954.

4. The report considered by the Eighth Conference contained a proposed two-digit classification (i.e. major and minor groups). The principal recommendations of the Conference with respect to the classification were:
   (a) that an earlier statement by the Seventh Conference concerning the nature of the classification be reaffirmed - i.e. the basis of any classification of occupations should be the trade, profession or type
of work performed by the individual irrespective of the branch of economic activity to which he is attached or of his industrial status;

(b) that the classification should relate to the principal occupation at the time of the census or other investigation, in accordance with national definitions;

(c) that the Governing Body of the ILO be requested to convene a working group of experts to collaborate with the Office in preparing a final draft of ISCO for consideration by the Ninth Conference.

5. During 1955 the programme as outlined by the Eighth International Conference of Labour Statisticians has been implemented and some additional steps have been taken. The provisional list of major and minor groups as adopted by the Eighth Conference was circulated to countries for comment in April. The documents circulated contained background information, illustrative notes on the scope and content of the ISCO groups, and specific questions designed to obtain the views of countries on points which would guide the development and implementation of the classification. Response to the material circulated was encouraging and helpful; replies being received from thirty-one countries and four international agencies. The interest of countries in this project was indicated by the painstaking care evident in their replies, many of which were quite detailed and presented thorough reviews of the classification.

6. In another step, beginning at the end of May, the Office obtained the services of a Canadian expert with broad experience in developing statistical classifications. This expert was to give full time to the development of ISCO during a period of one year. He was largely responsible for the analysis of country comments, and is preparing the relevant documents for the Ninth Conference. His first task was to prepare documents for the meetings in the Working Group of Experts; there were two basic documents, one being an analysis of the comments of countries arranged according to major and minor groups of the classification, and the other a proposed classification including unit (three digit) groups and notes on the content of each group. There is no doubt that these documents were a factor in the efficient manner in which the Working Group's task was accomplished.
7. The Working Group of Experts met for a period of three weeks during October and November 1955. It was a conscientious and able group and its report constitutes a landmark in the international classification of occupations. The report sets out briefly a summary of the principles and conventions (or working rules) that the Group found useful in its work; it then records a summary of the discussion and the action taken with respect to each minor group provisionally adopted by the Eighth Conference; finally it proposes a classification consisting of major groups, minor groups and unit groups. During the meeting the representatives of the Office took note of many specific points relating to the content of particular unit groups.

8. Examination of the groups provisionally adopted by the Eighth Conference with a view to developing the most suitable international classification for statistical purposes was taken by the Working Group to be its major objective. It took note, however, of the ILO view that at the international level an occupational classification can serve several purposes and that in the past correspondence has been maintained between the major groups of the classification for statistical purposes and for migration and employment placement. The Group frequently found it possible without compromising the suitability of the classification for statistical uses, to take account of its possible use for placement and other purposes as well.

9. The classification to be proposed to the Ninth Conference will be based essentially on the recommendations of the Working Group of Experts. A number of detailed questions were left to the ILO staff for solution, however, and certain broader questions on which the opinion of the member of the Working Group was almost evenly divided are under continuing study. In January 1956 work is to begin on a project designed to develop, by the end of the year, suitable international definitions of the detailed groups of occupations contained within each unit group of the proposed ISCO; occupational analysts have been recruited from a number of countries for this project. The Conference will not, of course, be asked to consider such further work in detail. Another contemplated step will involve collaboration with one or more countries in the development of an illustrative index of occupations.