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

Stefan Schweinfest

Director, United Nations Statistics Division
Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Mister Chairperson,

Distinguished Delegates and Colleagues,

There are two good reasons to keep this short today: (i) I promised it to John and (ii) as complex as it may sometimes seem, in the end it is actually fairly simple: My programme is your programme, so you won't be surprised if I tell you that UNSD will work on indicators, national accounts, census, trade, environment statistics and the integration with geospatial information. You told us what to do and we will do just that.

So, allow me here rather to send you some brief messages on how I intend to lead the office and the global statistical programme. And I will do so by stating 4 simple but Fundamental Principles.

- (i) We are ALL in this together.

I was joking recently that if I had to say in one line what my job is, I would say: "Keep it all together": the political and the technical, the developing and the developed countries, the member states and the international agencies, the proven established statistical procedures and the amazing world of new opportunities etc. etc. This week we have asserted ourselves as a vibrant community, ready and competent to engage. And I will make it a key focus of our UNSD efforts to support and strengthen this global statistical system through communication, coordination and cooperation (Thank you Lidia).

- (ii) The 'New' must build on the 'Old'.

There is plenty of new vocabulary: data revolution, big data, modernization and transformation, World Data Forum etc..... and sometimes we are still grappling to understand exactly where this journey will lead us. What we know exactly, though, is where we are

coming from: National Statistical Systems are the corner stone of our edifice – and I heard your voices loud and clear: I can assure you that strengthening national statistical capacity in all its dimensions, as discussed on Monday, will be an absolute priority for UNSD’s work, of course in close partnership with many wonderful bi-lateral and multi-lateral partners. But whilst we continue to focus on the foundations, we will also continue our outreach to new partners and help create platforms for new and exciting dialogues.

(iii) Thou shall not abuse your wonderful staff.

This Commission has identified a number of new and important areas where it expects UNSD to work: indicators, data revolution, household surveys to name just a few. As my bosses have surprisingly not yet gained the obvious insight that I need to double my budget, and as my great team seems to have a – sometimes hard to understand – desire to occasionally go home and sleep for a few hours, I will have to make some managerial choices, which will include more frequent usage of the word “No”. You have our proposed programme before you (CRP1). UNSD will need to streamline its work – especially in the data area: Modernisation starts at home. I shall seek the guidance and support of the Bureau when it comes to making specific adjustments to our programme.

(iv) There is no way to say ‘Thank you’ too often.

To put this Commission session together we had many helping hands: Funding for about 25 participants from developing countries came from the United Kingdom, the World Bank, the ECOWAS Secretariat and Paris21 and potentially other bi-lateral or multi-lateral donors who enabled individual participants to participate here. A cast of many prepared the over 70 side events, including the exhibition, acting as chairs, moderators, presenters, discussants etc. And most importantly our strong supporting network of working groups and task teams spent countless hours to prepare close to 40 substantive reports as a basis for our debates. Finally, last but not least my staff - the ‘orange-buttoned army’ - stood in the cold to welcome and orient you. A heartfelt ‘Thank you’ to all of you.

Dear colleagues,

In a locked room somewhere in this building I have a group of experts working on an indicator framework to monitor the Statistical Commission. They are currently looking at things like: ‘number of Deputy Secretary Generals showing up’, ‘number of not-low-level-inter-secretariat-ad-hoc-friendly-task-groups created’, ‘number of times the Director gets stopped on his way to the cafeteria for a friendly chat’, ‘number of unhappy people not finding a seat during the opening session’, ‘word count of the final report’, ‘number of times the chair felt tempted to throw the gavel at a delegate to make them conclude their intervention’ [footnote: some of these indicators are still under methodological review and may contain subjective, hard to measure elements]. By all these measures, I think we can rightfully say we had a great Commission session. Now the collective challenge before us is to put all the pieces together for what I sometimes refer to as the new Global Data Project – or short: the new GDP. We at UNSD are looking forward to working with all of you together on this.

Thank you for your attention and support.