



Statement on Programme Issues by Mr. Paul Cheung, Director of the United Nations Statistics Division to the 41st Session of the Statistical Commission

Agenda item 5: Programme Questions
New York, 25 February 2010

Mr. Chairperson,
Distinguished Delegates and Colleagues,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to present to the Commission the work programme of the UN Statistics Division. Before doing so, I would like to make a few remarks regarding the conduct of the 41st session of the UN Statistical Commission.

Programme aspects related to the Statistical Commission

I am happy to report that a total of about 130 countries represented by their national statistical offices and 40 international agencies participated in the 41st session of the Commission and its many side events. I would like to put on record my appreciation to all national statistical offices and international agencies that have helped in the preparation of the various events. Special thanks go to the organizers, chairpersons and speakers at the Seminar on Emerging Trends in Data Communication and Dissemination, the High-Level Forum on Official Statistics, and the many other special seminars during these 10 days. Special thanks should also go to the Latin American countries that have provided publicity material for the exhibition, which was an overwhelming success. I am also thankful for the facilitation provided by France, Sweden, United Kingdom, Paris21, ECOWAS Secretariat, the World Bank and UNFPA to some countries for their participation.

This Commission has considered 31 substantive papers, of which 13 were for discussion and 18 for information. The papers were posted on the web on time in all languages. The feedback I received was that the Commission is satisfied with the current methods of work, the documentation of the papers, and the split between discussion and information papers. This is the third year that we have considered all information papers as a block. This arrangement has worked well. The secretariat will work with the Bureau to further review the methods of work and make appropriate changes if necessary, especially in the direction of an even greater focus on the emerging issues.

As many of you know, the side meetings of the Commission began almost one week before the Commission session and continued throughout the two-week period. In this span, there have been many meetings; some are substantive in nature, others deal with programmatic planning or coordination. There are also many bi-lateral or multi-lateral consultation meetings. These two weeks in New York will continue to grow in their importance as the apex event of the global statistical system. We will continue to play the facilitating role to ensure smooth conduct of these meetings. To ensure proper planning, we would appeal to the organizers of the side events to consult with the coordinator of the Commission ahead of time.

Programme aspects related to the work of United Nations Statistics Division

Let me now turn more specifically to the work programme of the UN Statistics Division (UNSD).

World Statistics Day

I am very glad the Commission has now strongly endorsed the proposal and gave the permission to proceed. I firmly believe that the observance of the World Statistics Day, with the emphasis on the core values of service to the nation and the world, professionalism and integrity will help promote the importance of official statistics. A dedicated space on our website has been prepared. All activities related to this special day will be prominently displayed. A logo has been designed. I strongly urge all national statistical offices and international agencies to prepare posters and publicity materials and to hold observance events for this special day.

Global Geographic Information Management

In 2008, I have stressed in my programme statement that detailed geographical information is increasingly relevant for development analysis and policy decision making. This is now commonly known as a “Place-based” or “Location-based” information system. We believe that there are enormous benefits to be derived from a further systematic integration of geographical and statistical information, and putting in place appropriate infrastructure for the integration of the two. In many countries, this trend of integrating geographic and statistical information is already gaining momentum. In our Global Programme on Population and Housing Census, extensive work has been done to push for the geo-coding of census data. At the United Nations, the UN Working Geospatial Information Group (UNWGIG) brings together UN professionals working in the field of cartography and geospatial information management on common geospatial issues, such as maps, boundaries, data exchange, standards and naming conventions.

UNSD, supported by the Regional Cartographic Conferences and the Conference on Geographic Names, hopes to organize a world conference on Global Geographic Information Management in due course. A committee of experts has been established to

spearhead this process. This world conference will explore issues related to geographic information and the integration of statistical and geographic information.

Climate Change and Official Statistics

The Commission agreed in the 40th session that we should understand the data needs arising from the climate change agenda and see how official statistics can contribute. Our work in this area was delayed by the Conference of Parties negotiation processes as well as urgent work related to the financial crisis. We will now consult with member states on how to proceed on the substantive work and to engage the various stakeholders so as to assess the contributions to official statistics, especially in the so-called MRV - monitor, report and verify processes. Norway has suggested the formation of an Ad Hoc Group on Climate Change Statistics. This is a good idea and worth exploring.

National Quality Assessment Framework

Quality assurance is an essential part of our work and is the basis for the credibility of our institutions. This has been further highlighted by some recent political debates where the issue of the reliability of official statistics featured prominently. The discussion here at the Commission, based on the excellent programme review prepared by Statistics Canada, has shown that there is scope to develop a quality framework to ensure the quality of statistical procedures and outputs. The development of a common generic National Quality Assessment Framework, will facilitate bi-lateral quality related work, such as peer reviews, and will help those countries that are in the early stages of developing their quality procedures. The work on such a generic Framework template will of course build on the extensive work already done in this field by national and international agencies. UNSD will organize and support the group of experts in its work to develop such a framework to be presented at the next Commission session.

Data Dissemination

The very successful seminar on Friday on Data Communication and Dissemination, with its exciting presentations and lively debate has highlighted the importance of helping countries to make their statistical information more accessible to the broad spectrum of users. In light of ever increasing demand and fast developing technological tools, this is imperative.

The international community has so far primarily focused on the data production side. However, it is necessary to also exchange experiences on data dissemination and to develop tools that can be used by many countries. UNSD will be starting a programme to assist countries in all aspects of data dissemination, especially with respect to the MDGs. We will help countries to evolve a data dissemination policy, to build a national indicators database, and to link this data base to the data hub at UNdata. We will work

with all stakeholders on this effort, especially the UN Regional Commissions and other sub-regional entities.

At the global level, we will continue to improve UNdata as the gateway to access statistical information contained in the UN system databases. We will ensure, with our UN system partners, that the content is up-to-date and that data coverage is extended. We will improve metadata and functionalities, such as visualization tools, in line with user feedback received. With country databases to be added to UNdata, the data portal will serve as the core of the global data dissemination system.

UNSD Work Programme 2010-2011 and Strategic framework 2012-2013

As you may know, the UN functions in a two-year budgetary cycle. The budget and work programme for the years 2010 and 2011 was adopted by the General Assembly last year and the Commission took note of the Division's current work programme in its 40th Session. We have also prepared a proposed strategic framework for the biennium 2012-2013. It is available as a background document for the Commission's review and comments. The detailed biennial programme plan for the 2012-2013 cycle, modified as appropriate, will be presented to the Commission at its 42nd session in 2011.

Thank you.