



UNITED NATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION

Expert Group on International Merchandise Trade Statistics
Second meeting
New York, 3-6 November 2009

Opening Statement

Expert Group on International Merchandise Trade Statistics

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Dear colleagues,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to the second meeting of the United Nations Expert Group on International Merchandise Trade Statistics and congratulate you on the progress achieved so far in the preparation of the revised recommendation for this important area of statistics. The United Nations Statistics Division appreciates very much your active participation in three virtual meetings conducted during the last two years which made possible the timely preparation of the draft recommendations. The strong support of the draft recommendations during the second stage of a worldwide consultation, in which more than one hundred countries participated, is a testimony of your hard work and professionalism.

I note with satisfaction that the revised recommendations not only cover the conceptual framework of international merchandise trade statistics and harmonize it better with other economic statistics, but address the issues of data sources, data compilation strategies, quality assurance and dissemination. Such a holistic approach is appreciated by countries which need guidance on the totality of the statistical process and promotes better cross country comparability of the resulting data. Of course, it is not possible to reach consensus on all recommendations, but securing an endorsement of the provisional draft by a clear majority of countries is a commendable achievement and provides a solid ground for its finalization.

The main task of this meeting is to review the provisional draft of the recommendations and to assist UNSD in its finalization in light of the received country comments, so that the United Nations Statistical Commission will have before it in February next year a solid document ready for adoption.

The second important task is to advise UNSD on the implementation programme of the revised recommendations. At the center of this programme is the preparation of the updated version of the *International Merchandise Trade Statistics: Compilers Manual*. This publication is intended to provide supplementary explanations and advice to assist countries in the correct interpretation of the revised recommendations and in their effective implementation under various circumstances.

In addition to the cooperation in the preparation of the Compilers Manual I would like to ask the Expert Group to work closely with UNSD in such areas as technical assistance and further research of methodological and operational issues relevant to international merchandise trade statistics. In this connection I invite you to develop the EG work programme for several years ahead and to conduct periodical virtual, and physical, meetings to review the progress.

The revised recommendations better address the needs of many user groups from trade policy makers to compilers of national accounts. At the same time, they are pragmatic and clear on what is achievable within international merchandise trade statistics and what other statistical domains need to do to make use of these statistics with maximum possible effectiveness. In this connection it is important to continue the dialog with the compilers of national accounts and balance of payments which need to find ways to ensure the implementation of the latest revisions of their methodological guidelines. This work is essential in the context of an integrated approach to economic statistics intended to produce the totality of high quality official statistics in the most cost effective way.

To achieve the meetings goals and to ensure that the agenda items are taken up effectively, we continued our policy of inviting to the Expert Group countries from different regions and with different experiences, circumstances and needs. I am pleased that you accepted our invitation and came here to the UN headquarters for four days of discussions. I am also glad to welcome the representatives of the international and supranational organizations who are active in production and use of trade statistics and whose input in the revision process is very much appreciated.

In conclusion, I would like to wish you fruitful deliberations and to express my conviction that your efforts will result in a high quality draft recommendations.

Thank you.