



UNITED NATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION

**Workshop on the Methodology and Data Compilation of
International Merchandise Trade Statistics (IMTS),
Phnom Penh, 2 -5 February, 2010**

Opening Statement

**Workshop on International Merchandise Trade Statistics,
Phnom Penh 2010**

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Dear colleagues,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to this workshop on the Methodology and Data Compilation of International Merchandise Trade Statistics (IMTS). With sixteen trillion US dollars worth of goods in annual international trading, we can appreciate the importance of IMTS for giving us a feel for the pulse of the world economy, monitoring trade policy and market research.

It is not surprising therefore that international merchandise trade statistics are always in a high demand and all countries compile them to the best of their capability. Through improvements in technology, these statistics have become more easily available to users all over the globe. I am glad that the United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database (UN Comtrade) has been able to play an instrumental role in this respect.

However, it is also known that in some countries these statistics are not sufficiently developed and do not satisfy fully the needs of the policy makers, business community and general public. In a number of countries, even with well established trade statistics, there are concerns regarding the quality and international comparability of data, necessitating bilateral and multilateral reconciliation exercises.

This workshop aims to strengthen the statistical capacity of the five South East Asian countries Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Timor Leste and Vietnam in the area of IMTS, in particular with respect to data collection and compilation and the application of the concepts and definitions for IMTS (covering both existing and new or revised recommendations), taking into account that international trade is one of the economically most important sectors for this sub-region.

This workshop is part of a larger UN/DESA Development Account project initiated and managed by United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) which aims at strengthening and sustaining the statistical capacity for the production, analysis and dissemination of benchmark statistics for the five mentioned countries and which is based on the recognition of the importance of high quality statistics, and their effective use, in promoting the evidence-based socio-economic policies and achieving internationally agreed goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Besides international trade statistics this project will help increase the statistical capacity in the critical areas of (i) tourism statistics; (ii) industrial statistics; (iii) distributive trade statistics, (iv) the national accounts framework and (v) MDGs related statistics.

This workshop comes at an important and especially suitable time. Less than three weeks from now, namely from 23 to 26 February 2010, the United Nations Statistical Commission will have before it for review and adoption the draft revised recommendations for international merchandise trade statistics (International Merchandise Trade Statistics: Concepts and Definitions 2010 – IMTS2010). These recommendations were revised in compliance with the request made by the Commission two years ago at its thirty-ninth session and were prepared by the United Nations Statistics Division in consultation with the national statistical offices and the international organizations concerned and with the assistance of the Expert Group on International Merchandise Trade Statistics (EG-IMTS).

The revised IMTS2010 will provide updated or new recommendations and clarifications regarding the key concepts. In addition, the scope of the recommendations has been extended to cover the entire statistical process, thereby giving better and comprehensive guidance to compilers. In particular, new recommendation on institutional arrangements, data sources and data quality but also on linking trade and business statistics have been added and provide important reference points for the review and possible improvement of a country's external trade statistics.

The main goal of this workshop is to assist countries in the development of country specific action plans, which will provide guidance for the possible improvement of IMTS compilation and dissemination in your country. It is planned that as follow-up to this workshop each country will be visited by an UN consultant in 6 months from now to review the status of the implementation of the action plans and to provide advice as required. In a year from now a final assessment questionnaire will be sent to countries to review whether any improvements in the IMTS compilation and dissemination were achieved or are on the way.

This workshop is organized by United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), in cooperation with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN/ESCAP) and the National Statistical Institute of Cambodia (NIS) here in Phnom Penh. Taking into account the importance

of the cooperation between customs as the main data source and the statistical agencies in general responsible for the IMTS compilation, participants of both customs and the statistical agencies have been invited to this workshop. I am pleased that all of you accepted our invitation and came here to Phnom Penh for four days of discussions. We thank the NIS of Cambodia for hosting this workshop and for organizing it together with us and UN/ESCAP.

In conclusion, I would like to wish you fruitful deliberations and to express my appreciation of your professional contribution to this important meeting.

Thank you.