



UNITED NATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION

**Workshop on the updated and new recommendations
for International Merchandise Trade Statistics (IMTS 2010)
and their implementation in countries of the Sub-Saharan region,
Lusaka, Zambia, 1-5 November, 2010**

Opening Statement

**Workshop on International Merchandise Trade Statistics,
Lusaka, Zambia 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 twelve 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 consequently all countries compile them to the best of their capability. Through improvements in technology, these trade 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.

On 20th October this year, - only 2 weeks ago - we celebrated the first ever World Statistics Day. It was an historical moment for all official statisticians around the world. On that Day, we celebrated the many achievements of official statistics and the core values of Service, Integrity and Professionalism. We can be proud of the great wealth of reliable, good quality data that are being produced every day to inform policy makers, promote changes and monitor the progress of our societies. Statistics, including trade statistics, are crucial to economic and social development, and ultimately serve everyone in society.

This workshop falls in a month of celebrations of African Statistics, starting with World Statistics Day on the 20th of October and ending with African Statistics Day on the 18th of November. I take this opportunity to recognize and thank you and your colleagues for your contribution to the global statistical system. At the same time we recognize our obligation to continue our hard work, often under difficult circumstances and constraints.

Due to changes in trading practices, customs policies, information technology and the needs of policy makers, business community and general public, the international recommendations for IMTS were revised. Earlier this year, at its forty-first session (23 - 26 February 2010) the Statistical Commission adopted *International Merchandise Trade Statistics:*

Concepts and Definitions 2010 (IMTS 2010) and endorsed its implementation programme, including the preparation of the revised IMTS Compilers Manual and continued technical assistance activities. Further, the Commission requested that more attention is given to strengthening institutional arrangements in countries to ensure that proper national coordination mechanisms exist for the compilation of high quality international merchandise trade statistics. In a number of countries, even with well established trade statistics, there are still concerns regarding the quality and international comparability of data, necessitating bilateral and multilateral reconciliation exercises.

This workshop aims to strengthen the statistical capacity in the area of international merchandise trade statistics of the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa that are members of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and/ or members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Important aspects will be the application of the concepts and definitions for IMTS 2010 and data collection and compilation, taking into account that international trade is one of the economically most important sectors for this sub-region.

The revised IMTS 2010 provides 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 goals of this workshop are thus to explain the new and updated recommendations, to discuss the implementation plans of the international recommendations on IMTS and for countries to share their experiences in the compilation of IMTS also with view on identifying issues and best practices for inclusion in the updated IMTS Compilers Manual.

This workshop is organized by United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), in cooperation with Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). I am pleased that all of you accepted our invitation and came here to Lusaka for five days of discussions. We thank COMESA for

hosting this workshop and for organizing it together with us. We also thank the Government of the Republic of Zambia for providing their support to this event as the host country.

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.