



UNITED NATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION

**UNSD-SACU workshop on the implementation of the new recommendations
for International Merchandise Trade Statistics (IMTS 2010)
in the member countries of the Southern Africa Customs Union (SACU),
Johannesburg, South Africa, 12 – 15 June 2012**

Opening Statement

**UNSD-SACU workshop
on International Merchandise Trade Statistics,
Johannesburg, South Africa, 2012**

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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 almost eighteen 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.

The impact of the financial crises on global trade flows highlighted the need for more short term trade statistics to analyze the global economy in a more timely manner. In this respect, detailed monthly trade data are made available by many countries, but were not readily accessible at the global level. To meet this user demand and to enhance the policy relevance and analytical value of the internationally available trade data, UNSD started the collection of monthly data on merchandise trade. We are very grateful that many countries provide this data now on regular basis. In February 2012, UNSD launched UN Monthly Comtrade which makes this detailed monthly merchandise trade available to the public.

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. In 2010, 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 which has now become available in its draft version 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.

While ensuring the high quality of trade statistics compilation we also need to consider the bigger picture: In February 2011, the Global Forum on Trade Statistics, jointly organized by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) and the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) in Geneva, followed-up on the 2010 Statistical Commission's decisions and made explicit demands to improve the relevance of international trade statistics by connecting and integrating it with other economic statistics. The Global Forum further urged closer cooperation among the national agencies involved in the compilation and dissemination of international trade statistics to realize those improvements.

While countries are starting to adjust their systems to comply with IMTS 2010, it is timely to give direction and emphasis of the data compilation issues for these statistics. This workshop is organized by the Southern African Customs Union, in cooperation with UNSD in order to facilitate the review the implementation of the new international recommendations for merchandise trade statistics in the Member States of the Southern African Customs Union.

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. In the last two years, UNSD, in cooperation with the Expert Group on IMTS and with the support of other countries has been drafting the revised IMTS Compilers Manual, which aims to provide further guidance and best practices regarding the various elements of the new recommendations, among them the data compilation in the case of a customs union.

The main goals of this workshop are thus to explain the new and updated recommendations, to discuss the implementation in countries and for countries to share their experiences in the compilation of IMTS, also with view on identifying and discussing issues and best practices. The revised IMTS Compilers Manual, now available in its draft version, will be used as source of guidance for the implementation.

As mentioned, this workshop is organized by the Southern African Customs Union, in cooperation with UNSD. I am pleased that all of you accepted the invitation and came here to Johannesburg for four days of discussions. We appreciate this opportunity and thank the Southern African Customs Union for hosting this workshop and for organizing it together with us.

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.