

**High Level Seminar on The Digital Economy: A Policy and Statistical
Perspective
Beijing, People's Republic of China
15-17 November 2018**

**Welcome statement by Mr. Stefan Schweinfest
Director, United Nations Statistics Division**

Mr. Ning, Commissioner of the National Bureau of Statistics China

Mr. Liu Zhenmin, Under-Secretary General Department of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Ladies and gentlemen, good morning,

This morning, I am very happy to be here for two reasons: First, it is always a great pleasure to meet our dear colleagues and friends from the Chinese National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) under the leadership of Commissioner Ning. I always enjoy the very warm welcome here in China. We are celebrating today 10 years of successful cooperation between the NBS and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD). Second, the topic of measuring the economy correctly, is very dear to my heart. After all, I started working in the United Nations Statistics Division in 1989 in the area of national accounts.

I like to sincerely thank Commissioner Ning and his team of the National Bureau of Statistics of China for co-organizing with us this international dialogue between users and producers of statistics on the policy and measurement framework for the digital economy. I am also very grateful to all of you, who have come from all around the world and have accepted the invitation to participate in this seminar and to share national practices and challenges in formulating policies and measuring the impacts of the digital economy on jobs, economic growth and well-being.

Commissioner Ning and Under-Secretary-General Mr. Liu have set the policy and development frame for our High-Level Seminar. Please, allow me to add a few brief remarks and

reflections, more from a statistical management point of view, putting the High-Level Seminar into a larger perspective.

Where are we, in terms of methodological statistical development in the field of national accounts and economic statistics? Our core reference frame is, of course, the System of National Accounts (SNA), adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission – exactly 10 years ago. And it is, of course, important to see the SNA in the context of related international standards, such as the Balance of Payment or other international manuals for prices, statistical registers and business and trade statistics. Together, this architecture of statistical norms and methods allows us to produce coherent macroeconomic measurements, which are internationally comparable.

However, things change. Not only is there the phenomenon of rapid development in Information and Communication Technologies. There is also globalization. So, this high-level seminar is being organized at a very appropriate time, as the domain of economic statistics and national accounts is confronted with various challenges in measuring the transformations and dynamics in our economies. For instance, due to reductions in transportation costs, the information technological revolution, and more open economic policies, production processes of a final product are increasingly fragmented across the national economies. These cross-border production processes accompanied by cross border investment and financing arrangements make up the emerged global economy, the measurement of which is beset by its own challenges. Moreover, there are other changes: users increasingly demand a broader set of metrics beyond the traditional measures of economic statistics and national accounts, which inform about the impact of the economy on individual well-being and environmental sustainability.

So, what do we do? Under the United Nations Statistical Commission, we have defined a research agenda and this is always done in broad consultation among countries, with users and producers of data, in order to understand very clearly what the issues are and how they can possibly be resolved. A user-centered approach for economic statistics needs to be a central element to ensure that the views of the major stakeholders in the production and use of economic statistics are reflected in the advice to the Statistical Commission.

It is against this backdrop of emerging measurement challenges that the United Nations Statistical Commission will discuss economic statistics in March 2019. This discussion will surely build on the guidelines on integrated economic statistics welcomed by the Statistical Commission in 2012. A comprehensive programmatic view on all domains of economic statistics and statistical activities seems necessary under the umbrella of the conceptual framework of the System of National Accounts. Thereby, we will also need to discuss institutional arrangements. An institutional mechanism that could ensure the coherence and analytical value of both basic economic statistics and macroeconomic statistics could include ideas such as holding regular global forums on economic statistics steered by a special High-Level Group on Economic Statistics.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This seminar will not only provide us the opportunity to consider the main elements and research issues for the measurement framework for the digital economy, but also to consider the appropriate format in which this dialogue can and must be continued in future forums on economic statistics covering in addition to the digital economy, the thematic areas of globalization, well-being and sustainability.

We are looking forward to your views and ideas and to your continued engagement here and in all future discussions. I wish us all a fruitful meeting and an enjoyable stay in Beijing. Again, I am very happy to be here with all of you.

Thank you.