

30 April 2010

Dear colleagues,

Re: Compilation and Dissemination of Monthly and Quarterly Trade Data

The United Nations Statistical Commission at its forty-first session held on 23-26 February 2010 adopted *International Merchandise Trade Statistics: Concepts and Definitions, 2010* (IMTS 2010) containing the revised and new recommendations on trade statistics and endorsed an outline of the IMTS 2010 implementation programme. In this context, the Commission recognized the importance of the UN Commodity Trade Statistics Database (UN Comtrade) as the global database and information platform on international merchandise trade and requested UNSD to enhance its features and metadata.

Acting on the Commission's decision and based on users' feedback, we have decided to undertake in 2010-2013 a special effort to upgrade UN Comtrade. The main objectives of the upgrade include: (i) significant enhancement of metadata, (ii) inclusion of new data variables recommended in IMTS 2010, and (iii) adding monthly and quarterly trade data.

UN Comtrade was established in the early sixties and for almost fifty years has provided a wealth of information to policy makers, business community, research institutions and the general public. It stores standardised official annual statistics reported by countries and reflecting international merchandise flows in terms of both the *Harmonised Description and Coding System* (HS) and the *Standard International Trade Classification* (SITC) detailed by partner country with coverage reaching up to 99 percent of world trade. UN Comtrade is an essential data source for numerous commercial and non-commercial databases on international trade. It allows free access to any data record to any user worldwide and limited free download. Users with additional data access needs are offered data streaming services and additional customization features. UN Comtrade is hugely popular and its usage has been steadily growing. In 2009 it had 194,000 users which submitted queries (12 percent increase over 2008) and over 44 billion records were downloaded (3 percent increase over 2008). UNSD will make every effort to serve the global user community even better in future.

The impact of the financial crises on global trade flows highlighted the need for detailed monthly trade data in order to allow short term analysis of the global economy. Detailed monthly trade data are made available by many countries. However, unlike the annual data these data are not standardized and are 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 intends to begin the collection, storage and dissemination of detailed (6-digit level of HS) monthly and quarterly data as part of its regular work programme.

In this connection I would very much appreciate it if you could inform me by 1 June 2010 if your office will be able to (i) make available to UNSD for testing purposes your detailed (6-digit level of HS) monthly and quarterly trade statistics for the first three months of 2010 and (ii) supply such statistics on a regular basis beginning with data for January 2011.

Please send these data as well as any suggestions and comments regarding the use of UN Comtrade and your country data reporting to Mr. Vladimir Markhonko, Chief of Trade Statistics Branch (comtrade@un.org with copy to markhonko@un.org). Please note that we can accept your initial data submission in any database format which is convenient for you. Upon receipt of your data UNSD will review it and will contact you in order to agree on further arrangements.

Thank you very much for your kind cooperation in this important project.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Cheung
Director
Statistics Division/DESA