

Regional Workshop for South East Asian countries
Developing National Systems of Tourism Statistics: Challenges and Good Practices
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Opening statement

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Dear Colleagues,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to the regional workshop on tourism statistics: “Developing National Systems of Tourism Statistics: Challenges and Good Practices” within the LCD-SEA Development Account Project: Building Statistical Capacity in the Low Income Countries of South East Asia. The workshop is organized by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) jointly with World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and hosted by the Department of Statistics, Ministry of Planning and Investment of the People’s Democratic Republic of Lao. Both the UNWTO and UNSD see the workshop as an important part of their efforts to assist countries in the implementation of the *International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics 2008* (IRTS 2008), which were adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission at its 39th session in February 2008. The workshop will also help countries to exchange experience and identify good practices in building reliable tourism statistics.

People’s desire to visit places beyond their usual environment, be it in their own country or in foreign lands, results in travel and in the increased demand for goods and services thus generating additional employment and income. The fast growth in the domestic and international travel in the last decades made tourism industries the key contributors to the national income and employment in many countries. Nowadays, more than 700 million tourists visit foreign destinations and it is predicted that their number will reach 1.6 billion by 2020. For many countries, tourism is one of the key components of their GNI – which was achieved after a lot of investment in the tourism industry: building infrastructures and providing services for foreign tourists as well as domestic tourists. It is understandable, therefore, that countries have a keen interest in better measuring tourism related activities. At the same time, tourism may have some adverse environmental and social consequences. Also, a heavy reliance on tourism may make a

country's economy more vulnerable during the difficult economic times as we are experiencing it now.

In this context the availability of high quality tourism statistics is vital for an effective fact based policy making. The task of providing the policy makers and society at large with the necessary and reliable information squarely falls on the compilers of tourism statistics both in national statistical offices and in national tourism administrations. This makes the strengthening of a strategic alliance between these institutions as well as between them and the central banks a crucial precondition for the success of national tourism statistics programmes. I sincerely hope that this workshop will contribute to the sense of the importance and urgency of making more progress in this direction.

The United Nations Statistical Commission at its nineteenth session in 1976 approved a provisional guideline on statistics of international tourism and a handbook titled "Recommendations for Tourism Statistics" was drafted and adopted by the Commission in 1993. The methodological development continued and a conceptual framework was developed for the design of the tourism satellite account with the goal to satisfy the demand for more detailed and wider data on all the aspects of the demand of goods and services which might be associated with tourism within an economy, to observe the operational interface with the supply of such goods and services within the same economy and to describe how this supply interacts with other economic activities. The handbook "Tourism Satellite Account: Recommended Methodological Framework" was born as a cooperation effort of four international organizations (UNWTO, OECD, Eurostat and UNSD) and was adopted by the Statistical Commission in 2000. After the adoption of the manuals international organizations have been working on implementing the recommendations and further on to update them.

IRTS 2008, an updated manual, having been drafted by UNWTO in close collaboration with UNSD, ILO and other members of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Tourism Statistics, provides a comprehensive methodological framework for collection and compilation of tourism statistics. IRTS, containing 9 chapters, covers all the aspects of tourism statistics for the aim of helping countries to implement or to develop their statistical system. The workshop will be useful not just for country participants but it will be a valuable experience for the UNWTO and UNSD as these organizations will further develop their technical assistance programmes in tourism statistics in years to come.

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