

**First Meeting of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC)
Statistical Commission
11-12 April 2011, Istanbul, Turkey**

Opening Statement

**Paul Cheung, Director
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Dear Colleagues,

I am delighted to have the opportunity to address such a distinguished gathering of senior statisticians from the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Member States. It is a great pleasure for me to be part of this important event and witness the commitment of OIC to further the development of official statistics in its member states. Your presence here today testifies to the enormous interest in building strong and efficient statistical systems in your countries and in advancing the statistical development in the Organization of the Islamic Conference as a whole. Allow me also to extend my thanks to the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC) and the Islamic Development Bank for inviting the United Nations Statistics Division to participate in this meeting.

Today is an important day, as it marks the establishment of a new inter-governmental body on statistics – the Statistical Commission of the Islamic Conference countries. With the launch of your Commission, you are joining the group of other high level bodies dealing with regional and international statistical development. In fact your Commission with its 57 Member States spread over 4 continents will be one of the largest inter-governmental bodies after the United Nations Statistical Commission.

It gives particular significance to this Commission that it brings together Member States which share unique cultural and religious bonding. There is no doubt that the Islamic countries have demonstrated a high level of collaboration and cooperation in their statistical endeavors. We

warmly welcome this initiative as it is a great step forward in strengthening the global statistical system.

We have witnessed in the past decade a trend towards the globalization of economic and social activities. Associated with this process is the growing global demand for official statistics at national, regional, and global level. As evidenced by the recent economic and financial crises and challenges related to climate change, the global economy as well as social and environmental development challenges do not recognize borders. Agreements on development frameworks, such as the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, also give a rise in demand for detailed statistical information. All these have increased our “information interdependence”. Governments, the private sector, researchers and the public at large demand comparable and reliable data not only for their own country, but also for other countries and for regional and global aggregates.

Our response to the challenge of the globalization of the demand for official statistics is the effort to strengthen the global statistical system and to improve its response to user demand. The elements of the system are the national statistical systems and the regional and international agencies, which are active in producing and disseminating official statistics at the sub-regional, regional and global level. These elements are linked with each other in a complex network of bi- and multilateral data exchanges and cooperation. Despite all the cultural and political differences and the amazing variety of backgrounds, one of the cornerstones of the global statistical system is the strong sense of community, which is based on shared professional ethics and common methodology. This professional vision has been enshrined in the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, which were adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission in 1994.

As the network of global statistics continuously expands and gets more complex, there is an increasing need for governance and leadership. Given that the ultimate decision power, the resources and the statistical expertise reside with the member states, it is only a logical consequence that the leading regional and global bodies should take the form of inter-governmental Commissions. This is the reason why the United Nations Statistical Commission has been a crucial factor in building and strengthening regional and global statistical systems in the past. On the strength of its record, the United Nations Statistical Commission is also well placed to provide leadership in the future for a higher level of cooperation to face future crises.

This would include a wide range of activities on methodological development, as well as major initiatives to bring information to the world, such as the UNdata initiative. One condition for the United Nations Statistical Commission to work effectively is for it to build on the important work done by the regional and international Committees and Conferences.

I am happy to note that in the past few years the level of engagement of the Organization of the Islamic Conference Member States on the stage of global statistics has significantly risen. In 2005, 18 members attended the United Nations Statistical Commission. By 2011 this number had doubled, with 36 countries attending the latest 42nd session of the Commission in February this year.

This meeting is unprecedented in your Organization and represents a very important step in the work to build sustainable and effective statistical systems in each of its Member States. Looking ahead, a lot more work needs to be done to make the Commission really operational, to turn it into the authoritative and leading body for statistical development in your Organization. At the country level, there needs to be commitment to cooperation within the Organization as this may require additional efforts and responsibilities taken on by countries. In order to achieve concrete results within a foreseeable future, it may be necessary for the Commission to focus on selected statistical areas. I hope that at the level of the international and regional organizations, as well as of the development partners, strong support could be given to this body.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you again for this important step forward of launching the first meeting of the Organization of the Islamic Conference Statistical Commission and to assure you that United Nations Statistics Division is committed to fully support you in your efforts.

I wish you all successful deliberations.

Thank you.