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**United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific  
Fourth session of the Committee on Statistics  
Opening Statements**

**Bangkok, Thailand, 25 March 2015**

Your Excellency, Khun Somboon Mekpaiboonwattana, Vice Minister the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology of Thailand,

Dear colleague and friend Director of the UN-ESCAP Statistics Division Anis Chowdhury  
Distinguished delegates and colleagues,

When I woke up in the middle of the night, I realised that for me coming to see you in Asia and the Pacific is like an act of solidarity – now I know how you feel when you are coming to our meetings in New York.... Despite my jet-lag, it is, of course a great pleasure for me to be with you, today, on this occasion of the Fourth session of the UN-ESCAP Committee of Statistics. I have had the privilege of coming to Bangkok several times, but I always enjoy the natural beauty of Thailand, the inspiring history of the Kingdom of Siam, the spicy delicious food and of course, most importantly, the warm and hospitable kindness of its people – and believe me, warm feels really good after 4 months of winter and snow in New York City. So, thank you – kob kun krab - your excellency, for creating such an enabling environment for our delegates to come together and develop a sense of a professional community. This is certainly the spirit of the United Nations. A special thanks also to Anis and his great team here at the UN-ESCAP Statistics Division. As we just organised a big meeting two weeks ago, I certainly know – and appreciate - how much quiet preparatory work is needed in the background!

Distinguished delegates,

2015 is an important year for the United Nations. In exactly six months from now, leaders from around the world will meet at our headquarters to celebrate our 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary and to commit to a new global development agenda for the next generation. Our statistical community is called upon to play a central role in the monitoring of the goals and targets of this

new development agenda. To put it in a simple phrase: Sustainable Development will need to be supported by Sustainable Statistics. This is a moment of enormous opportunity, but also of great challenge for all of us. On the one hand we are thrown into the limelight like never before. Everybody is talking about statistics and data. Two days ago the Chair of the Statistical Commission addressed the UN General Assembly for the first time in history, to talk about indicators. We are revolutionaries. The New York Times even called statisticians a ‘sexy’ profession. Who would have thought that?

On the other hand there are many challenges: Whilst our political leaders and the public at large have an increasingly voracious appetite for reliable and timely information, we in the statistical offices are often struggling with stagnant or even diminishing resources. We are all asked to do more with less: the ultimate managerial challenge. The data revolution calls for new methodologies and new data, increasingly disaggregated and yet integrated, data from traditional sources as well as from new sources (big data), incorporating geospatial dimensions, data that are ‘real-time’ and open..... The rapid ICT developments will of course help, but to truly satisfy these demands, our professional statistical community will have to continuously strive to transform and modernize our National Statistical Systems under the leadership of the National Statistical Offices. I was once asked what I saw as the three main elements of the data revolution, and I said capacity, capacity and capacity. Financial, human and institutional capacity.

In building such capacity, we can only be successful if the statistical community has strong support and full political backing from the highest national authorities – and that’s why the heightened attention is important and can be helpful. Through the endorsement of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics by the most important political body of the United Nations, the General Assembly, governments around the world have officially put on record their commitment to supporting national statistical systems. Let’s build on that. Let’s use the Fundamental Principles and the forthcoming World Statistics Day in October to tirelessly make the argument for the value of good and solid official statistics. We do have an exciting job to do!

Dear colleagues,

Another important way to ease the resource pressure is to work together and to share investments and experiences. This is why you are here: To work on a joint Asia and Pacific statistical programme – in professional solidarity. Asia and the Pacific as a region has in many ways a privileged position in the world, due to its rich history, its human resources and its heterogeneity, all the more reasons why working together may not always be easy, but will ultimately be beneficial. And looking at your agenda, this week, you are demonstrating once again, that Asia and the Pacific is at the forefront of global statistical development, for instance in the areas of civil registration and vital statistics, modernization of statistical systems, big data, integration with geospatial information systems, disaster statistics and development of a network of professional statistical training: Your Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP) is unique and leading in the world. I am confident that the solutions you will find in your debates, will serve as models, not only for your region, but also for the world! I am personally and passionately committed to helping to make the connection, not only between you and the other regions, but especially between you and the global statistical programme.

Let me conclude, then, by wishing you all a professionally rewarding and enjoyable experience at this session and by assuring you that we at the UN Statistics Division are privileged to be your partners on our common journey forward.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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