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Statement

by

Mr. Sven ALKALAJ

United Nations Under-Secretary-General

Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

at

the 61st plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians

Palais des nations (Room XVIII) (9.30 a.m.), 10 June 2013

Dear Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to address you on the occasion of the 61st plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians.

I am glad to note that **the Conference attracts wide participation**. Countries not only from the ECE and OECD regions, but also beyond, take part in the work of the Conference, such as Brazil, China, Colombia and Mongolia.

Statistics is a priority working area of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.

As many of you may know, **the work of ECE has undergone a thorough review** by its member States during the past two years. In 2011, our member States decided to review and assess the implementation of the recommendations from the ECE Reform conducted in 2005. The aim was to set the strategic direction and make concrete proposals for ECE's future work, including in the area of statistics.

The review has now been completed. Its outcome was endorsed by the 65th session of the Economic Commission for Europe, which took place in Geneva, in April this year. During the review, the member countries expressed strong support for the work of the Conference of European Statisticians and the Statistical Division. The review emphasized the way the Conference and its subsidiary bodies work as a good example of efficient and flexible cooperation with other international organizations active in statistics, and in particular with main partners in the region, such as Eurostat, OECD and the CIS Statistical Committee.

I would like to quote some views expressed by our member States during the review. They stated that:

- “the Conference has **a unique and complementary role**” in international statistics; and also that
- “the Conference is attended by very high-quality and experienced people and it is **one of the most active and proactive international statistical forums** in the world”.

The review concluded that the Conference of European Statisticians **works in an efficient way and produces concrete results with clear added value**, including methodological principles, recommendations, guidelines and databases. The Commission appreciates the fact that the work of the Conference attracts additional funding including from outside the ECE region.

I am impressed by the results of your work and would like to congratulate all of you on your continuous contribution. Your work benefits statisticians and users of statistics not only in Europe, but also globally. You should be proud of your work, and promote the tangible results more visibly to politicians and others who need and use official statistics.

The Commission session also highlighted the **need for action in follow-up to the Rio+20 Conference** in view of the directions set in the outcome document “The future we want”. This is a high priority for the United Nations and for ECE. Member States have given you a clear mandate to give particular attention to the work on measuring sustainable development and to continue its capacity building activities, which are of benefit to those countries in the region who need it.

In this regard, I am pleased to see that **you will dedicate a full day to discussion of the measurement of sustainable development in follow-up to Rio+20**. Your role as statisticians is critical to this process.

“The future we want” relies on evidence-based policy making – **the document makes several references to statistics, data and information.** The Conference, however, started already in 2006 to discuss the issue of how to measure sustainable development. At this plenary session you will be discussing the ***CES recommendations on measuring sustainable development.*** I believe that these recommendations will provide a valuable contribution to the ongoing global process to develop Global Sustainable Development Goals, and to set targets and indicators for their measurement.

It is of crucial importance that the Sustainable Development Goals be measurable. Thus, **statisticians should be involved in setting up the goals and targets** from the very beginning. This is a key lesson learned from measuring the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals.

Many of the activities undertaken by the Conference are the joint effort of leading experts from our member countries, the secretariats of Eurostat and OECD, and valuable partners such as the CIS Statistical Committee and IMF.

Over the last few years, **these capacity building activities have been strengthened** thanks to the support and financial contribution by partners such as the World Bank, UNFPA and EFTA. Moreover, recently the ECE capacity building activities have benefited from countries’ donations (financial and in-kind) from member States including the Russian Federation and Turkey. We are also very grateful for the support provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and Statistics Netherlands to the immense work of the High-level Group on modernization of statistical production and services.

The Conference is an important intergovernmental mechanism which provides a platform for identifying emerging issues in statistics and for developing new statistical standards in response to growing information needs.

During the next days, the Conference will discuss a number of important and interesting initiatives. These range from the seminar on providing access to micro-data to measuring human capital and statistics related to population ageing, as well as measurement of poverty and climate change related statistics.

With challenging topics like these, the Conference promises to be very interesting and highly relevant to current global debates on the post-2015 development agenda. **Statistics portray the society**, and you need to address a variety of topics. This requires a lot of knowledge and experience, but also vision and determination. I trust in the continued professionalism, ability and support of the Conference to face these challenges.

I would like to conclude by wishing you a successful Conference, and look forward to the outcomes of your deliberations.

Thank you.
