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**Meeting of the Expert Group on
International Economic and
Social Classifications
New York, 18-20 May 2011**

Opening remarks

Paul Cheung
Director, United Nations Statistics Division

Dear colleagues,

It is my pleasure to welcome you on behalf of the United Nations Statistics Division to this meeting of the Expert Group on International Economic and Social Classifications. This Expert Group is held in high esteem by the international statistical community, because it has been instrumental in guiding the work on International Classifications over the past years whereby the successful revision of ISIC and CPC was a major achievement. Building on these major accomplishments, we continue to count on your expertise in advancing the work in international classifications.

We are now seeing good progress in the implementation of these classifications and it is time to plan for the next steps in keeping these classifications relevant and consider new requirements for classifications that result from developments in other statistical fields and also learn from experiences in the development and implementation of classifications that have not been in the focus of this group so far.

Looking at the agenda, I see four major topics for discussion.

The first topic addresses the review of the mandate of the Expert Group. It has been more than ten years now since the UN Statistical Commission has given the Expert Group the mandate of being the central coordinating body for implementing the work programme on international economic and social classifications. The original mandate has been framed, in the context of the revisions of ISIC and CPC, while recognizing that the work

of the Expert Group should encompass all economic and social classifications. A discussion at the last meeting of the Expert Group has started to review this original mandate given by the Commission to ensure that it still reflects the current directions and challenges of classifications work and that the existing governing structures and the relationships between the custodians of classifications in the world-wide statistical system are suitable for successful work of the group. I understand that new draft Terms of Reference have been elaborated and I expect that the group will review these and provide a new mandate that will be submitted to UN Statistical Commission in 2012 to define the scope and mechanisms of work for the Expert Group in the future.

A second topic revolves around general criteria for the development of classifications at the international and national level. A statement of best practices has been produced by the group in 1999 and is now being revised to reflect new requirements for international classifications. Your review and approval of this revised document will strengthen the concept of the International Family of Classifications, which provides guidance for a large variety of classifications being developed or considered in different statistical domains. The criteria that you define in this document will guide the work of this group when new classifications are being brought before it and it ensures that new classifications are being developed according to consistent criteria from the very beginning. The concept of the Family as a set of approved classifications also assists users in identifying appropriate tools for statistical work.

Since international classifications can only be truly successful if they provide guidance at the national level and find acceptance through national implementations, I also want to

invite you to review available technical assistance activities for the implementation of classifications and to establish mechanisms to follow the implementation of the international classifications around the world.

A third major topic considers a number of product-related classifications and subsequently their link to the Central Product Classification as the reference classification for products. The linkages between these classifications are an expression of the harmonization among classifications that can be achieved using the existing structures. Your review of these classifications should lead to recommendations for their improvement, if necessary, decide whether they can be considered as members of the Family and also provide guidance for future improvement of the CPC as the central mechanism for production statistics. I understand that these will be very technical discussions covering a variety of subject matter areas, yet they are linked through the common concept of “products” and I know that your experience will enable you to come to suitable conclusions in these cases.

A last major topic will address how we maintain a large system of classifications and how we interact with users. As the group of users of our classifications is constantly evolving, so do the requirements that are being placed on these classifications. Efficient ways of interacting with users – during the process of developing or revising a classification, as well as during the implementation and final use phase – are crucial for a widespread recognition and use of the classification, for its consistent application and for its ability to reflect new needs, both within and outside of the statistical community. We

expect to draw from your expertise to develop more efficient ways to respond to these requirements and produce tangible recommendations for this.

Dear colleagues,

I have to admit that you have a very ambitious agenda for the next three days but I am confident that your deliberations will break new grounds and advance a tailored program of work for the domain of international economic and social classifications.

Thank you for your attention.