

Work Session on Water Statistics
Vienna, 20-22 June 2005

Opening Statement by
Paul Cheung
Director United Nations Statistics Division

Dear colleagues,

I would like to convey the greetings of the Director of the UN Statistics Division Dr. Paul Cheung, who is unfortunately unable to participate personally in this meeting. He has tasked me to transmit to you his best wishes for the success of this meeting. He has also asked me to transmit the following statement to you.

UNSD is grateful to the Austrian Environment Agency for hosting this Work Session and its warm hospitality. As you are aware, this meeting is organized by the Intersecretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics, which comprises of the UN Statistics Division, UNEP, OECD, Eurostat and UN-ECE. We would also like to thank FAO and GEMS-Water for their very active collaboration in the preparation of this workshop, and the Austrian Environment Agency for all the hard work they have put in to the organization.

Fresh water is a precious and finite natural resource, essential for sustaining life and human development, for economic production, and for the environment. Integrated water resource management is the key to ensuring the optimal use of water while respecting environmental constraints. Integrated water resource management requires reliable,

accessible and harmonized data on all aspects of the water cycle including fresh water resources, water abstraction and use, emissions to water, water quality and water treatment.

Water statistics and accounting are priority areas of the UN Statistics Division. UNSD collects, in collaboration with UNEP, country data on fresh water on a biennial basis. A manual for data collection, currently being developed by UNSD, will support and guide countries in their efforts to set up a water data collection. UNSD has launched recently a major initiative to promote and further develop the system of Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting. The Water Accounts is one of the most advanced modules of this system, and when fully implemented, it promises to be a powerful tool to support Integrated Water Resource Management. The UNSD/UNEP water questionnaire is compatible with the water accounting framework, (except for some details, which will come up during this workshop), and will be a major data source for the water accounting framework. The UNSD is gearing up its efforts to promote the implementation of water accounting.

Our objective for the workshop is to establish an agreement on a set of variables suitable for the main water indicators and able to deliver basic data for water accounting. All variables should be relevant both at national and international level, and their collection should be feasible, at reasonable cost. Agreement should also be achieved about definitions and about the use of international classifications.

The results of this work session will be taken on board by the Intersecretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics. Your comments will also be an important input for both the Manual for water data collection and the Handbook on Water Accounting.

I hope that the discussions during the next three days will be successful and an important step forward in international collaboration on water data and on global harmonization of water statistics.

Thank You.