

Ad-hoc Energy Group Meeting New York 23-25 May 2005

Opening speech by Mr. Paul Cheung, Director, Statistics Division, United Nations

Good morning and welcome to New York. I am glad to host this important meeting on energy statistics here at UNSD. The UN Statistical Commission has the tradition of putting selected subject areas of statistics under a magnifying glass for a comprehensive programme review. At its last, 36th session in March 2005, the Commission discussed the situation of national and international energy statistics in detail.

Energy statistics is often not included in the traditional work of statistical offices. In the majority of countries, energy ministries, agencies specialized in one fuel type or in one particular flow, or sometimes large energy companies, are responsible for energy statistics. Country energy data is often produced outside the system of official statistics.

Today, quality requirements for energy statistics have become exceptionally high, because of the unique economic, environmental, social and political significance of energy. Furthermore, this intricate link between energy, society, economy and environment, means there is an increasing need to improve the integration of energy statistics with economic, social and environment statistics.

It is clear that this integration and the necessary quality assurance can be done most effectively within the system of official statistics. However, as opposed to other areas of statistics, such as for instance price statistics, national accounts or international trade, where several groups focus on methodological development and coordination under the aegis of the UN Statistical Commission, there is no existing similar mechanism for the scientific, methodological development and coordination of energy statistics. And we don't have a strong international community of energy statisticians.

The United Nations Statistics Division has been engaged in the production of global energy statistics for more than 50 years: our latest yearbook is the forty-fifth in a series of annual compilations which commenced under the title 'World Energy Supplies in Selected Years, 1929 - 1950'. The Division has developed key methodological handbooks and guidelines for the collection of national energy statistics and for compiling energy balances. The UNSD Database currently contains detailed energy statistics for more than 200 countries since 1950.

The oil crises of the 1970's wakened the developed world to its increasing dependence on oil. At that time, we saw the creation of several agencies that engaged in collecting and disseminating energy information. This resulted in accelerated development of methodology, and more and better energy data. On the other hand, with thirty years of hindsight, we can see that it has led to a certain amount of duplication, separate development of concepts and methods, and consequently, a lack of harmonization in some areas. There is a need for guidance how to work towards convergence instead of divergence.

Good examples exist: the Joint Oil Data Initiative, known as JODI, is the success story of strong collaboration among six international organizations towards transparent, reliable and timely monthly oil statistics. The JODI has created a good amount of political interest and visibility and this momentum should be channeled into the improvement of overall energy statistics.

Removing duplicate data requests, and standardizing our requests to a core set of data required to meet the basic energy policy needs are essential. And we must help countries build the statistical competences needed to carry out this work.

Responding to these requirements is the new challenge to official energy statisticians and to national statistical offices. This is why the Statistical Commission recently reviewed the situation of energy statistics. The Commission agreed that there was an array of emerging issues that require methodological development and quality assurance in energy statistics, improved integration of energy statistics with economic, social and environment statistics, closer links between energy policy and statistics, and better coordination and harmonization at the national and international level.

The Statistical Commission requested that UNSD convene this Ad hoc Expert Group Meeting on Energy Statistics to identify the major issues rising from the new requirements, establish priorities, and identify the proper statistical fora to address these issues. The Meeting has to report back to the Bureau of the Statistical Commission with outlines of specific mandates and recommendations, including a defined timetable, for future work.

So what this group comes up with after two and a half days of discussions will set the agenda for a much longer term work by national and international experts to improve the availability and quality of energy statistics both at national and global level. Through this process it is expected that energy statistics will be anchored firmly as part of the system of official statistics and a strong community of energy statistics experts will evolve.

I thank you in advance for your support, participation and contribution to this work. I wish you a successful meeting, good discussions, and a forward looking and feasible set of recommendations for submission to the Bureau of the Statistical Commission.