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**ESCAP COMMITTEE ON STATISTICS, First session
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**Opening Address by
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**THE GLOBAL STATISTICAL SYSTEM AND THE ROLE OF
REGIONAL COMMISSIONS**

Dear Colleagues,

It gives me great pleasure today to say a few words at the opening session of the Committee on Statistics. As you know, this is my home region and I have been very much involved in the previous meetings of the Committee on Statistics. It is indeed homecoming for me, to be able to meet old and new friends and discuss critical statistical issues facing the region.

Today is an important day, as it marks the completion of a process to revitalize the regional intergovernmental bodies on Statistics. With the launch of your committee, all five UN regions now have distinct high level bodies dealing with regional statistical development. It is a great step forward in strengthening the global statistical system.

We have witnessed in the past decade a trend towards the globalization of economic and social activities. Associated with this process is arising global demand for official statistics at national, regional, and global level. As evidenced by the current economic crisis and challenges related to climate change, the global economy as well as social and environmental development challenges do not recognize borders. Agreements on development frameworks, such as the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, are facilitated a rise in demand for detailed statistical information. All these have increased our "information interdependence". Governments, the

private sector, researchers and the public at large demand comparable and reliable data not only for their own country, but also for other countries and for regional and global aggregates.

Our response to the challenge of the globalization of the demand for official statistics is the effort to strengthen the global statistical system and to improve its response to user demand. The elements of the system are the national statistical systems and the international agencies, which are active in producing and disseminating official statistics at the sub-regional, regional and global level. These elements are linked with each other in a complex network of bi- and multi-lateral data exchanges and cooperation. Despite all the cultural and political differences and the amazing variety of backgrounds, one of the cornerstones of the global statistical system is a strong sense of community, which is based on shared professional ethics and common methodology. This professional vision has been enshrined in the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, which were adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission in 1994.

As the network of global statistics continuously expands and gets more complex, there is an increasing need for governance and leadership. Given that the ultimate decision power, the resources and the statistical expertise reside with the member states, it is only a logical consequence that the leading regional and global bodies should take the form of intergovernmental Commissions. This is the reason why the United Nations Statistical Commission has been a crucial factor in building and strengthening regional and global statistical systems in the past. On the strength of its record, the UNSC is also well placed to provide leadership in the future for a higher level of cooperation to face future crises. This would include a wide range of activities on methodological development, as well as major initiatives to bring information to the world, such as the UNdata initiative.

One condition for the UN Statistical Commission to work effectively is for it to build on the important work done by the regional Committees and Conferences. In an effort, to strengthen the linkages between the global and the regional bodies, the UN Statistical Commission has now a standing agenda item on regional development. In fact, at the forthcoming session in February, the regional statistical development of Asia and the Pacific will be discussed by the Commission. I anticipate that the statisticians from around the world will welcome the formation of this

ESCAP Committee, will be eager to learn about your programme and your advances and will be willing to share cooperative experiences and practices in other regions.

I would like to conclude my address by briefly talking about some important challenges lying ahead of you and us in the context of firmly establishing the ESCAP Committee for Statistics. The most important first step, namely having this meeting, has been done. Still, this is only the first step. To make the Committee really work, to turn it into the authoritative and leading body for Statistical Development in Asia and the Pacific, a number of conditions need to be fulfilled: At the country level, there needs to be commitment to regional cooperation. This may require initially, additional efforts by countries to take on the responsibility for leading a working group or hosting an event. There is a lot of scope for the effective exchange of experiences and for sharing the load of developing new techniques or methods, that cooperation will ultimately be beneficial for all. In order to achieve concrete results within a foreseeable future, it may be necessary for the Committee to focus on selected statistical areas.

At the level of the international and regional organizations, as well as of the development partners, there needs to be recognition, that this body, bringing together all the Chief Statisticians from the Asia and Pacific countries, is the legitimate and appropriate forum to discuss and coordinate all matters related to statistical development in this region. The ESCAP Committee on Statistics offers an important forum for countries to exercise their leadership and ultimately hold international agencies accountable.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you again for this important step forward of creating the ESCAP Committee on Statistics. I would like to assure you that UN Statistical Division is committed to fully support you in your efforts. I hope to see many of you again at the 40th session of the UN Statistical Commission in 3 weeks in New York.