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**Meeting of the Expert Group on
International Economic and
Social Classifications
New York, 1-4 September 2009**

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 yet another major achievement. Building on these major accomplishments, we continue to count on your expertise in advancing our work in international classifications in a transparent and comprehensive manner.

In keeping with the mandate of the Expert Group, the agenda throughout this week has been organized around three types of classifications, which are characterized by different stages of development and implementation. Firstly, the classifications that have been successfully revised like ISIC and CPC and are now subject to implementation. Secondly, the classifications that are currently reviewed or revised. And finally, the newly proposed classifications still under development. Each of these three types of classifications require your attention from different perspectives: from practical considerations taking into account country practices in their implementation through conceptual assessments regarding classification principles and to the placement of new classifications in the family of classifications. Although your agenda cover a diverse set of issues, I am convinced that your deliberations will guide our future work on these topics given the strong composition and the collective knowledge of this Expert Group.

Let me take this opportunity to make a few remarks and express my expectations about the outcome of the different sessions of the agenda: an agenda that reflects very much the progress made on many of your decisions taken in your previous meetings.

I recall that the revision process of ISIC, CPC and ISCO has dominated the discussions on classifications in the past years. With these revisions completed, your deliberations now shift to assist countries in the implementation of these important classifications. You will have before you two draft documents that have been prepared based on previous recommendations by the Expert Group, which will provide countries, as well as other users, with valuable tools in implementing and using the classifications.

The *Companion Guide to ISIC and CPC* is a new type of document that has been created for the first time in the 60-year history of these classifications and sets a new milestone in the development of documentation for statistical classifications in offering detailed explanations about the coverage and the boundaries of the various classifications. You are invited to review this document and provide inputs for its improvement. In addition, the *Implementation Guide to ISIC Rev.4*, which is also before you in draft form, provides countries with practical guidance on the setup of an adaptation and implementation process for their national industry classification. This latter document draws on the expertise of European countries, which have developed a similar set of documentation for their specific purpose. It is expected that this Expert Group provides additional inputs and

validates this document as a guide to countries around the world in adapting and implementing the revised ISIC classification.

The discussion of these two implementation documents and the discussion of additional implementation tools signals an end to a very important phase of the revision of the ISIC and CPC classifications. Meanwhile, we must not forget that classifications are constantly evolving, keeping up with the changing nature of economic development in the world. Therefore, you should consider an updating process of these classifications to meet ongoing economic developments and propose mechanisms on how future revisions should be organized. I trust that you will be guided in the formulation of this updating and revision process for these classifications by a sensible approach, which will seek a balance between the need for change in light of the economic developments, the need for stability and continuity of our time series and the resource implications of revisions.

Your work during this Expert Group meeting will not be limited to ISIC, CPC or ISCO. Both the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) and classifications applied in the health accounts are put up for your review. Moreover, the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) is under review. In our constant pursuit of improving our working processes and making use of new technologies, I am sure that experiences gained in these revisions can be successfully applied to other areas of classifications. I am looking forward to your recommendations in this regard.

The agenda for this weeks meeting includes also deliberations on a number of classifications that are still being developed. This includes a number of classifications with an environmental theme, coming from our international efforts in revising the *System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA)* by 2012 as well as the drafting of the *International Recommendations for Energy Statistics (IRES)* by 2011. In both cases, the development and formalization of these statistical frameworks create the necessity of standard classifications such as for waste and energy products. These new classifications will be subject to your review whether they comply with best practices in the development of classifications and are compatible to existing statistical classifications to the extent possible. While both proposed classifications have their own fundamentals and conceptual intricacies, they will nonetheless be connected by a common thread reflecting the need for consistent approaches to the development of classification.

Dear colleagues,

It has been 10 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 decision has been made, and the original mandate 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. I would like to ask you to take some time and review this original mandate given by the Commission to ensure that it still reflects the current directions and challenges of classifications work, the existing governing structures and

the relationships between the custodians of classifications in the world-wide statistical system. In your review, you should be mindful of the fact that a frequency of biennial meetings of the Expert Group might not be enough to truly steer development in this area and need to look at ways to extend the working capabilities of the Group beyond the meetings themselves. A review of a governing structure, similar to other standing groups in statistics should be part of the discussion. Your review of the mandate and setting of a new scope and tailored governance of the future work programme should be reported back to the Statistical Commission, to recognize, re-authorize and formalize the future work of this group.

I have to admit that you have a very ambitious agenda for the next four days but I am confident that your fruitful and successful 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.