

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery by Dr. Noeleen Heyzer,  
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**Third session of the Committee on Statistics  
12 December 2012, Bangkok, Thailand**

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Your Excellency, Group Captain Anudith Nakornthap,  
Minister of Information and Communications Technology of Thailand

Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

### **Introduction**

I am very pleased to welcome you all to the third session of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics. I am especially pleased to recognise participants from all five ESCAP subregions, with 136 delegates, representing 37 member States. I would also like to welcome our partners from 13 different international development organizations.

This engagement with the work of the Committee, is firm evidence that the Partnership for Statistics Development in Asia-Pacific, established in 2010, is flourishing, and that there is growing appreciation of the fact that good datasets can change mindsets in our region.

I would like to start by acknowledging the hard work and dedication of the Chairs, co-Chairs and members of the working groups, steering groups and technical advisory groups that were established at the second session of the Committee. In particular, I wish to express our appreciation to the members of the Bureau, under the leadership of Mr. Brian Pink, who have so effectively guided the inter-sessional work.

At our High-level Meeting on Monday and Tuesday, about the Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) in Asia and the Pacific, we focused on the importance of making every life count. Comprehensive and reliable data, supporting rigorous statistical analysis, are amongst our most important tools for linking national and regional resources to the lives of people most in need.

Statistics alone do not feed the hungry, create jobs, or change lives, but they can help us to see new options and better target our actions to build a more inclusive and sustainable Asia-Pacific region.

*Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen*

### **Statistics for Sustainable Development**

The United Nations Rio+20 Conference, held in Brazil earlier this year, forged a global consensus that sustainable development is the central challenge of this generation. Striking the right balance between the economic, social and environmental pillars of development, is the only way for us to ensure equitable, inclusive and sustainable growth in Asia and the

Pacific – which in turn is how we will best be able to address our growing inequalities and build the future we want.

To strike this balance, however, requires better, more complete understanding of the complex interrelationships between our communities, our economies and our environment. Because so many of our development challenges, such as persistent poverty, climate change, and financial crises, stretch across borders, effective planning and policies require improved regional coordination on information and data. This is why our ESCAP Committee on Statistics is such an important part of our sustainable development efforts.

Much of our big final push to 2015 on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) requires strengthened CRVS systems for better performance and aid effectiveness measurement. Our regional discussions about the post-2015 sustainable development agenda also call for improved statistics. As we work to develop the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we need to ensure that the indicators chosen are measurable, and that progress can be tracked within the capacities of national statistical systems.

The Rio+20 outcome document called on the United Nations Statistical Commission to launch a programme on broader measures of progress to complement gross domestic product. The Committee has a central role in engaging national statistical systems to formulate regional positions that can influence the global processes. I am pleased, therefore, to see that this issue is reflected in the agenda of this session. The statistical community need to seize this opportunity to accelerate statistics development, including the exploration of new measures of development.

*Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen*

### **Issues for Decision by the Committee**

At its second session, in 2010, this Committee set two ambitious goals. The first of these was to ensure that, by 2020, “all countries in the region have the capacities to produce an agreed basic range of population, economic, social and environmental statistics”.

In pursuit of this goal, and as the result of hard work by member States, development partners and the Secretariat during the past two years, this session will consider major regional programmes in the areas of economic statistics, agricultural and rural statistics, and civil registration and vital statistics. I would also urge you to consider endorsing the new Regional Strategic Plan for Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, which emerged from the High-level meeting this week.

The Committee will also deliberate on a core set of population and social statistics to be used to guide capacity development efforts, and consider its future work on environmental statistics. Your decisions on these matters are of great strategic importance and will be critical in shaping the future statistical systems of our region to meet the information needs of governments and civil society alike.

The second goal, “to create a more adaptive and cost-effective information management environment for national statistical offices through stronger collaboration”, is equally pressing in the face of the flood of data that is created by the interaction of vast networks of mobile phones, computers and sensors – also known as Big Data.

When transformed into meaningful, useable information, these large data sets can reveal trends and patterns that are tremendously useful to our leaders and policymakers. We need to make sure that national statistical systems are ready to take on this enormous challenge and unique opportunity. I am pleased, therefore, that the Committee will deliberate on the

establishment of a regular forum to continue dialogue and collaboration on this important topic, and that a side-event on a related topic, namely Information and Communication Technology (ICT) statistics will take place during this session.

The success of the Committee's efforts depends on well-trained and motivated staff of the national statistical systems. I am very pleased that the Committee has taken the initiative to improve regional coordination of statistical training, and that, during the 8<sup>th</sup> session of the Governing Council of the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP), held here at ESCAP last week, recommendations were made to improve the financial situation of SIAP to position itself in leading the region to meet its statistical training needs over the next decade.

I have also noted that the Committee will this week consider developing a framework to monitor its own work, so that all of our stakeholders can access timely and accurate information on progress and results. I applaud the Committee for taking up this challenge.

While the Committee's 2020 goals guide this agenda, I am also pleased that the decisions taken by the United Nations Statistical Commission and the ESCAP Commission feature so prominently, as do the linkages with our subregional sustainable development challenges.

*Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this Committee session presents a valuable opportunity for us to advance the statistical agenda to the benefit of the people of Asia and the Pacific.

It is my hope that our statistical community will find a common voice in support of statistics for sustainable development, endorsing the proposed regional plans and collaborative mechanisms that have been put forward for deliberation and decision.

I wish you a successful Committee session.

I thank you.