

Opening address of Mr. Sven Alkalaj, UNECE Executive Secretary

60th plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians, 6 – 8 June 2012, Paris

Dear delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to be here on the occasion of the 60th plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians and to address you.

First of all, I would like to congratulate all of you for the long record of widely recognized results you have achieved in the Conference. Your work benefits statisticians and the users of statistics not only in the ECE region but globally.

I attach great importance to the statistical work you do under the auspices of the Conference. Close international cooperation is “a must” for official statistics. Internationally comparable statistics is indispensable to governments in all countries, and to everyone in the society.

I assumed my new position as Executive Secretary of UNECE quite recently, in April this year and your Conference is the first UNECE body I address.

I am impressed by the large number of tangible results achieved by the Conference in the last several years. I am particularly impressed by the broad range of topics covered in the work - from guidelines on measurement of globalization and migration to recommendations related to new forms of families and households and statistics on household income, as well as more technical topics, such as the use of new sources for official statistics and modernisation of the production of official statistics.

The Conference has a solid foundation. The first Statistical Conference took place in Geneva already in 1928 under the League of Nations. It led to a series of meetings of national and international statistical experts. In 1953, the name “Conference of European Statisticians” was adopted and a series of regular meetings were launched.

Thus, the Conference is one of the oldest intergovernmental bodies in the UNECE. Yet, you manage to maintain its high relevance for 60 years. A year after year you discuss cutting edge topics: sustainable development, globalization, gender equality, new technologies in data sharing, measuring human capital, modernizing statistical production. Just to mention a few.

Currently, the UNECE is undergoing a review by the member countries with the purpose to set future priorities for each programme, one of which is statistics. I would like to share with you three main points raised by the Executive Committee during the review of the statistical work:

- The Conference is seen as one of the most active and proactive international statistical forums in the world that produces outputs with a global impact. I recognise that this is due to the active participation of leading experts from the ECE member

countries but also experts from the countries which are members of the OECD. Most outputs are a joint effort of UNECE, OECD and Eurostat.

- Second, the Executive Committee recommended that other programmes at UNECE should learn from how the Conference works in a flexible way using Task Forces and Expert Groups which have concrete objectives, deliverables and sun-set clauses.
- Thirdly, the Conference was given as an example for the very good and close cooperation and coordination of work between international organizations active in statistics in the region. We enormously value the excellent cooperation in statistics with Eurostat, OECD, IMF, the World Bank and the Interstate Statistical Committee of the CIS countries and with many other agencies, such as UNFPA, ILO, etc. The very active and efficient Bureau of the Conference, together with member countries, decide about the statistical work of UNECE which ensures that we do work that matters to our member countries. The fact that the Conference is hosted by OECD every second year is another sign of this good cooperation. I would like to thank the OECD for hosting the Conference in Paris.

The Executive Committee also commended the Conference for the efficient and effective way it organizes its work through video conferences and back-to-back meetings.

The review of the UNECE work will conclude by the end of 2012. I believe during this review the work of the Conference and the statistical activities have gained new supporters among policy makers and diplomats represented in the ECE Executive Committee.

I would also like to congratulate you on the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

The Conference created the Fundamental Principles and these Principles have set the code of practice for producing official statistics all around the world.

As highlighted in many papers prepared for the seminar tomorrow, the Principles have remarkably shaped the evolution of statistics – in both developed and less developed statistical systems.

From the agenda, I can see that today you will discuss the future of population and housing censuses. This topic is of particular interest to me, as my country, Bosnia and Herzegovina is preparing to conduct its first population census in 20 years.

Population censuses represent the very foundation of statistical systems, providing important information for other statistics and for planning public services. Recently, countries have done major technological and methodological innovations in carrying out censuses which have made the work more efficient.

The census is always a complex and expensive undertaking. The recommendations that the Conference developed for the last round of censuses were crucial for the successful completion of this major exercise in the member countries. I very much look forward to our discussions today towards framing the future of the population censuses.

I would like to conclude by wishing you a successful Conference.