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Mr. Bustamante,
Dear Colleagues,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this regional workshop on statistics of international trade in services. This workshop is part of the programme of support to developing countries by UNSD and others for the implementation of the revised international recommendations for statistics of international trade in services contained in MSITS 2010.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the Government of Colombia and especially to Mr. Bustamante and his staff at DANE for their support to make this workshop a success. I would like to recall that UNSD organized a similar workshop on trade in goods jointly with DANE here in Bogota only 3 years ago; and our experience has been so good that we have returned to now organize a workshop on trade in services. I am extending the thanks of our Director Paul Cheung to Mr. Bustamante for helping us again. I can also inform you that this will be the last workshop conducted under the leadership of Mr. Cheung who is leaving UNSD at the end of this month.

In this opening statement, I would like to start by painting the broader picture of how trade statistics need to change due to economic globalisation and to the international operations of businesses; and thereafter I will come back to the theme of the workshop this week.

Rapid technological advances in the past few decades in transport, computing and telecommunications, including the development of the Internet and electronic commerce, have resulted in enterprises availing themselves of resources for production at more distant locations and have enabled them to serve ever wider markets. This trend towards globalization, reinforced by liberalization policies and the removal of regulatory obstacles to economic activities, has fuelled the steady growth of multinational enterprises, international investment and trade in goods and services. Better communication and transport have also facilitated the movement of people for the purposes of tourism, migration, employment and trade.

This paragraph which highlights globalization and trade in services comes straight out of the manual of statistics of international trade in services; it very well words how complex trade in services has become. A Harvard professor on International Trade, Prof. Elhanan Helpman published a small but very enlightening book with the title “understanding global trade”, in which he explains numerous issues on international trade of current political interest. Speaking about changes in international trade and foreign direct investment he concludes by stating that “as a result, the study of international economic activities has to be refocused time and again in order to appreciate and better understand the evolving channels through which countries influence each other’s economies.”

In February 2011, UNSD and the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) organized a Global Forum on Trade Statistics with participation from policy makers, trade analysis and statisticians. This Forum made explicit demands to improve the relevance of international trade statistics by connecting and integrating it with other economic statistics and also urged closer cooperation among the national agencies involved in the compilation and dissemination of international trade statistics to realize those improvements. While countries are starting to adjust their systems to comply with the new international recommendations it is timely to give direction and emphasis of the data compilation issues for these statistics.

At the upcoming meeting of the United Nations Statistical Commission in February 2013, a report on international trade statistics will be discussed. This report will describe the growing economic interdependencies among countries be it through international trade, multi-national enterprises, global value chains or the outsourcing of business functions. The report proposes to start work on a new umbrella framework which will bring together these mentioned areas of international trade in goods and services, foreign affiliates statistics, foreign direct investment, outsourcing of business functions, manufacturing services, global production, and trade in value-added. Such framework should more tightly show the connections between the accounting frameworks (SNA/BOP) and the basic trade and economic statistics involving businesses which operate across borders.

My team at UNSD, or more specifically, the trade in services section headed by Karoly Kovacs, leads the international effort to develop a Compilers Guide for MSITS 2010, which should give practical compilation guidance to all those statisticians working in national statistical offices, central banks or ministries who have responsibilities in collecting, compiling or disseminating trade in service statistics. The first full draft of the Compilers Guide will be ready towards the end of 2013.

This brings us to the main goals of this workshop, which are to explain the updated recommendations of MSITS 2010, to discuss the specific compilation issues, and for countries to share their experiences in the compilation of statistics of international trade in services. We are very happy to have with us this week two very experienced resource persons, namely Maria Borga and Marion Libreros Pinot. Maria Borga is a senior statistician of the US Bureau of Economic Analysis, who will share with us the US experience in compilation of business services and FATS, and in the use of IT tools at US BEA. Marion is a consultant for UNSD, but happens also to work at DANE and lives in Bogota. Marion has an incredible rich working experience in national accounts and in travel and tourism statistics, and she will lead the programme on Thursday. Finally, I would also like to single out the representatives of ECLAC, ALADI and the IADB, who will bring in the regional perspective to the workshop. I am very happy to have them here.

In conclusion, I would like to thank again Mr. Bustamante and DANE for the valuable efforts to make this event a success, I would also like to thank all participants for making the effort to be here this week and I wish you all very fruitful deliberations and hope that this will be an enriching experience for everyone.

Thank you.