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Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

Meeting of Directors of Statistics of the Americas

Santiago, Chile, 24 - 26 March 1999

Statistical
ACTIVITIES OF THE ~~REGIONAL~~ COMMISSIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS */

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The Statistical Commission of the United Nations constitutes the most important forum for the development of official statistics in the international field. Not pursuing describing its rules nor its complete set of functions, it seems useful to remember that it is the organism where most of the international statistical classifications are described and approved. Additionally, the Commission discusses biennially the main guidelines of the statistical activities of the international organisms that belong to the United Nations System, which implies identifying working areas, establishing priorities, and giving guidelines on the main methodological and operative aspects.

In the last years, the Commission has carried out a diagnosis on the functioning of the international statistical system and has prepared proposals to make it more efficient (see document E/CN.3/1999/23 "Report of the ad-hoc group established by the Statistical Commission"). In its proposals it has given a central role to the strengthening of the regional fora of Directors of Statistics in which the Statistical Divisions of the Regional Commissions of the United Nations act as Secretariat. Conscience exists on the fact that the participation of developing regions in the work of the Statistical Commission has not acquired the desirable intensity and depth. For these reasons, the Secretariat of ECLAC, in consultation with its member countries, has included in the Agenda of this Meeting of Directors the topic of the activities of the Statistical Commission of the United Nations.

The aim is to give Directors an updated view of these activities, to ask their opinion on some topics in which the Commission has shown its interest, to get acquainted of regional points of view, and to organize the regional participation in the working groups that function in the framework of the Commission.

The debate has been structured in four areas: permanent functions of the Commission, technical cooperation, official statistics principles, and the working group activities.

The permanent functions of the Commission, in the terms described above, make it necessary to examine the regional possibilities of organizing a more active participation. This seems specially important regarding the approval of classifications, their updating, the follow-up of the implementation of accounting schemes such as the System of National Accounts, and the work of encouraging official statistical activities that the Commission can undertake.

The Commission wishes to know the opinion of the regional governments in two specific items: technical cooperation and the principles of official statistics. In the first item, a group of experts prepared a report on technical cooperation that has been distributed as part of the documentation of this Meeting (document E/CN.3/1999/19 "Some Guiding Principles for Good Practices in Technical Cooperation for Statistics"), that will be introduced by INEGI Mexico that was one of the members of the expert group. Additionally, the opportunity will be used to discuss a regional technical cooperation proposal presented by the Government of Peru.

The Statistical Commission approved a set of principles on official statistics. The Meeting of Directors considered this topic in its Meeting of October of 1996. The document has

been prepared ("Meetings on Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics") that updates the activities related to this official principles and it is expected to go through the possibilities of regional participation in them.

In the last years, a new institutional mechanism has been introduced in the framework of the Statistical Commission of the United Nations. The Commission prepared a summary of topics where statistical demand derived from the economic and social transformations, was not finding an adequate response from the international statistical system. It was the case of critical areas where the resources of the international organisms were insufficient to deal with them. A pioneer group existed (Voorburg Group on Service Statistics) where it had been possible to conciliate the effort of governments and international organisms, in a more informal framework than the one of previous working groups. Following this model, a set of working groups generically called city groups has arisen. They conciliate efforts of organisms and countries to deal with a specific topic. A document that describes the objectives and present status of work of these groups has been distributed for this Meeting (E/CN.3/1999/7 "Report of City Groups"). Within this groups, some of them are related to the fulfillment of the resolutions of the principal world conferences of the United Nations. On this topic two documents have been distributed (E/CN.3.1999/15 "Report on Poverty Statistics" and E/CN.3.1999/14 "Harmonization and Rationalization of Development Indicators in the United Nations System"). During this Meeting, it is aimed to organize the regional participation in these groups.