

Opening remarks by Gilberto Calvillo
Chairperson of the Statistical Conference of the Americas
of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

José Luis Machinea, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC);
Distinguished colleagues from the national statistical offices and institutes of the member countries of ECLAC;
Distinguished representatives of international bodies and agencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Two years ago, when the members of the current Executive Committee were entrusted with the task of conducting the work of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, we were very aware of the ideas and efforts of our predecessors, who had worked to establish a system for communication, for the sharing of experiences and the creation of projects. That system has guided our endeavours to bring about improvements in statistical information at the regional and national levels.

One example of continuity in relation to our predecessors' work has been the design of a strategic plan, a report on the activities conducted in 2005-2007 and a programme of regional statistical work for 2007-2009. These documents will be reviewed and discussed in the coming days. This continuity effort also includes the work that has been done in the framework of the regional public goods initiative of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Without the negotiations held in the past we would have been unable to progress as far as we have.

I would like to emphasize some aspects of our activities over the past two years:

First, thanks to joint efforts and dialogue between member countries and the secretariat, we are presenting the final version of the Strategic Plan 2005-2015 at this meeting of the Conference. This document is a guide which will facilitate the harmonization of criteria in choosing the course we will follow as a region in terms of official statistics. More specifically, the Strategic Plan will provide an important framework for coordination and collaboration in the professional and management activities for which we are responsible.

Second, we have the report on the activities carried out under the Programme of Regional Statistical Work for Latin America and the Caribbean, July 2005 – June 2007, which will be presented by the secretariat of the Conference with the necessary documentation, under two headings:

- The first relates to the work done in the framework of the specific work programme of ECLAC, where there have already been efforts to coordinate activities in relation to the four strategic objectives agreed by the Conference;
- The second relates to the activities of the working groups created at the third meeting of the Conference, which have taken shape thanks to the interest of the national statistical institutes and offices and the strong support provided by international bodies and agencies such as IDB, the International Monetary

Fund, the United Nations Statistics Division, PARIS21, and by countries both within and outside the region.

Over the past two years the Executive Committee has expedited its work thanks to informal discussions, coordination meetings and exchanges of information which have taken place during international meetings which our responsibilities required us to attend. With four such informal meetings, in addition to the two statutory formal meetings of the Executive Committee, we have combined our efforts, advanced our projects and obtained additional resources so that we can move our programmes forward more quickly.

All of the above has been reflected in the preparation of this fourth meeting of the Conference, which has been preceded in the first half of this year by the holding of four technical working groups on the Millennium Development Goals and poverty lines; national accounts; population and housing censuses; and human resources and training. Discussions will be held and decisions made on the reports of these groups and their future activities during this meeting of the Conference. We will also have reports from four other groups, one on institution-building, one on information and communication technologies (ICT), one on gender statistics which has been working for a number of years and is now integrated into the work of the Conference, and one on migration and remittances which came into being later, as a project in Central America.

I wish to underline the importance of the attendance and support of colleagues from countries which are members of ECLAC and of this Conference but are located outside Latin America and the Caribbean. They have made available to us their experience and best practices, thereby improving the efficiency of statistical work in the region. Support from Canada, the United States and Europe has contributed to both the organization and the content of this meeting of the Conference. Examples include the active participation of Spain as the leader of the group on training, of France and the United States in our work on alternative census methods, and of the Statistical Office of the European Communities (EUROSTAT) which will be addressing the subject of best practices in official statistics.

Also of great significance is the effort to harmonize our activities with the work of both ECLAC and the United Nations Statistical Commission. Efforts have been made with ECLAC to bring projects closer to the concerns of the countries, as called for in our programmes. It is of great significance that, pursuant to the recommendation of this Conference, we took part in the session of ECLAC in March 2006, contributing a short document which basically explained the need to harmonize the statistical work programmes of this Conference and of ECLAC.

Our most natural link with the United Nations Statistical Commission is our participation in its meetings and our use of the documents it produces. We must consider and study the output of experts from the entire world in different areas of statistical work, as reflected in the documents prepared for the meetings of the Commission and those presented at the Conference of European Statisticians, in order to adapt their recommendations to the situation in our region.

Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/6, based on a proposal adopted last year by the United Nations Statistical Commission, reflects constant demand from a number of countries in the region. The resolution calls on Member States to “intensify their efforts to strengthen national statistical capacity” and urges international agencies to support those efforts and make use of information generated at the national level. This position has been sustained firmly and is, I am sure, essential for the healthy development of official statistics in the region. The United Nations Statistics Division has commented regularly on innovative approaches developed in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, generating increased interest in our region’s statistical activities in that Division and among other bodies.

In conclusion, I wish to emphasize the support we have received over the past two years from ECLAC, particularly from the technical secretariat of the Conference, in our activities during that period. We are very grateful to Hubert Escaith, Horacio Santamaría and particularly Máximo Aguilera, and of course to their team here at ECLAC. We could not have achieved the same efficiency and results without their patience and their commitment to the work of the Conference and the Executive Committee.

Dear colleagues, we are aware that improvements can and must be made in official statistics in the countries of the region, to ensure the success of the public policies needed for the economic and social development of our peoples. As we begin this fourth meeting of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC, we are aware that much has been achieved but much yet remains to be done.

I have no doubt that the new Executive Committee to be elected on Friday will lead us to still greater progress. We all appreciate what it is to share experiences, learn from each other and take responsibility for the efficient management of available resources to improve our official statistics at the regional and national levels.

Thank you.

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