

**WORDS BY MS. MARTA MAURÁS, SECRETARY OF THE COMMISSION,
ECLAC, AT THE VI MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF
THE STATISTICAL CONFERENCE OF THE AMERICAS OF ECLAC**

Madrid, Spain, 25 September 2006

Distinguished Chairperson of the Executive Committee,
Distinguished Chairperson of the National Statistical Institute of Spain,
Esteemed members of the Executive Committee,
Honourable delegates,
Colleagues,

First of all, I would like to thank the National Statistical Institute (INE) of Spain for its support and warm hospitality, which have made it possible for us to gather here in Madrid for the sixth meeting of the Executive Committee of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC.

At our previous meetings in Rio de Janeiro, Panama, Santiago, Dallas and Mexico City, we have brought realism and enthusiasm to the task of shaping a strategic and yet practical architecture that will serve as the basis for endowing this Conference with the type of institutional structure called for in resolution 2000/7 of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. To that end, we have considered and tried out a number of formulas and mechanisms for fulfilling the founding objectives of the Conference, which are:

- To promote the development and improvement of national statistics and work to ensure that they are comparable internationally, bearing in mind the recommendations made by the United Nations Statistical Commission, specialized agencies and other relevant organizations;
- To foster international, regional and bilateral cooperation among national offices and international and regional agencies; and
- To draw up a biennial programme of regional and international cooperation activities to meet the requirements of the countries in the region, subject to the availability of resources.

During these two days we will be taking further steps in these directions. Without attempting to give an exhaustive description of the broad and demanding agenda before us, I would like to emphasize three items of great importance for the consolidation of the Conference: consideration of the final draft Strategic Plan 2005-2015, to be submitted to the Statistical Conference of the Americas for final approval

at its fourth meeting, in June 2007; a review of the progress made by the working groups and the challenges facing them; and the decision to be taken on guidelines for the biennial programme of regional and international cooperation activities.

As you will recall, it was during our meeting in Dallas that the Committee decided to equip the Conference with a strategic plan to serve as a road map for its work over the long term. As it was designed to do, this plan clearly reflects the leadership role which the Conference is called upon to play in developing and improving statistics in the region and in ensuring their international comparability.

The four major objectives defined in the strategic plan — institution-building, human resources, development of statistical capacities and strengthening of international cooperation — and the three major statistical challenges — constructing an appropriate information system to monitor progress towards achieving internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, preparation of the 2010 round of censuses, and implementation in all the countries of the region of the System of National Accounts (1993 SNA), along with the changes in the SNA scheduled for 2008 — constitute a solid and demanding framework of priorities for the biennial programme of regional and international cooperation activities.

At its third meeting, the Statistical Conference agreed to establish working groups and related mechanisms to encourage countries to play a more active role in developing the Conference's regional and international cooperation programme and to share their experiences, maximize the use of the invariably scarce supply of available resources, and promote joint activities and initiatives. The working groups are a new component of the Conference and, as such, are necessarily subject to appropriate oversight of their work and results. This Executive Committee will be responsible for assessing their outputs, the difficulties they identify and the challenges to be met in order for the working groups to make a real contribution to the objectives of the Strategic Plan and to the regional and international statistical programme.

This Executive Committee also attaches a great deal of importance to the discussion of guidelines for the preparation of the biennial programme of regional and international cooperation activities. As stated in resolution 2000/7, one of the main objectives of the Conference is to draw up this biennial programme. Its fourth meeting will be the first occasion on which the Conference will be called upon to adopt a biennial programme within the context of the strategic plan 2005-2015. This places significant demands on the Executive Committee, which must ensure that the lines of work contained in the biennial programme are fully consistent with the four strategic objectives and the three principal statistical challenges outlined in the strategic plan 2005-2015. The biennial programme must reflect the richness and diversity of the region's statistical work, as well as the need to strive constantly to achieve regional, subregional, bilateral and international cooperation while avoiding any duplication of effort in the proposed activities.

The strategic plan, the cooperation programme and the working groups are all based on an approach which takes into consideration the multiplicity of actors involved. The role of the Executive Committee is to help link and coordinate all these stakeholders.

As the representative of the Conference's secretariat, I would like to reiterate our firm commitment to the objectives and work of the Executive Committee and the Conference.

I would also like to go one step further than that: I would like to convey to all of you the enthusiasm with which the Office of the Executive Secretary of ECLAC views the Conference, which it regards as a unique intergovernmental forum for a high-level political dialogue open to all the various offices and other agencies in the field of statistics.

We believe that during its relatively short existence, the Conference has already proven its worth as an intergovernmental forum designed to promote official statistics and cooperation in this sphere in the region.

We must, however, recognize that the attributions and limitations of the subsidiary organs within the framework of the intergovernmental system of ECLAC and its secretariat lend themselves to a certain ambiguity. This may lead to the misconception that the Conference's area of work is confined to ECLAC, whereas its sphere of action as a policy-setting body is in fact much wider.

There is no other intergovernmental forum in Latin America and the Caribbean with such potential; indeed, this is a unique opportunity to forge a culture of dialogue and of technical and policy coordination which will gradually enable the various governmental and international stakeholders to harmonize their efforts. One of the most important challenges in this regard is to ensure that statistics are accorded a high priority on the policy agenda of the region's Governments and that decision-makers become aware of their importance for the design, monitoring and evaluation of public policies.

In short, we want to see the Conference act as the catalyst and driving force behind regional cooperation in the field of statistics, one that will harness, mobilize and structure all the efforts and energy arising from the active participation and cooperation of the countries, ECLAC and international organizations working in Latin America and the Caribbean.

We are convinced that under the guidance and vision of its Chairperson, Gilberto Calvillo, this sixth meeting of the Executive Committee will be recalled as a milestone event that has made a constructive contribution to consolidating the Conference's leadership role in promoting statistics and regional and international cooperation in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

I cannot end my remarks without mentioning a fact that is a source of both sadness and happiness for us. Hubert Escaith, the current Director of the Statistics and Economic Projections Division, is leaving ECLAC to take up new challenges in what has already been a brilliant international career. On behalf of the Executive Secretary of ECLAC, I wish to express our appreciation for the important work carried out by Hubert as Director of this Division. All your colleagues, Hubert, join me in wishing you every success in this new phase of your career.