



ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Fiftieth Session

OFFICIAL RECORDS

Tuesday, 27 April 1971,
at 10.50 a.m.

NEW YORK

President: Mr. Rachid DRISS (Tunisia).

AGENDA ITEM 7

**Report of the Statistical Commission (E/4938, E/4989,
chap. VI, sect. A; E/L.1372)**

1. The PRESIDENT drew the attention of the members of the Council to section A, chapter VI, of the report of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (E/4989), which dealt with the report of the Statistical Commission.

2. Mr. LOFTUS (Director, Statistical Office) recalled that the report of the Statistical Commission on its sixteenth session (E/4938) had been considered by the CPC during its general review of United Nations programmes in the economic and social fields. In the interests of conciseness certain activities of the Commission and the Statistical Office were discussed somewhat cursorily in the report. For example, the international statistical strategies and the high-priority programmes for the next five years were not described in great detail. The Commission's work covered five basic areas: first, in the field of social statistics, an attempt was being made to establish an integral system corresponding to the System of National Accounts (SNA) in the field of economic statistics. Secondly, development statistics were defined to enable the developing countries to formulate their plans for the Second United Nations Development Decade by helping them to establish their own statistical systems. About 100 experts were engaged in helping countries to devise national systems, and three institutes, situated in Rabat, Tokyo and Kampala, were providing training for experts at the national level. Two additional institutes were being set up at Yaoundé and Dar es Salaam. One of the tasks of the Statistical Office was to combine the statistics prepared by various international agencies in specialized fields into a single system with a view to facilitating access by the developing countries to the data they needed. Thirdly, in the area of electronic computing techniques most countries were confronted with the problem of a shortage of qualified personnel. Measures were being taken to remedy that situation with the help of UNDP. Fourthly, the United Nations statistical staff were trying to improve international co-ordination with a view to devising a fully integrated system which would meet the needs of both the developing and the developed countries. Lastly, the Statistical Office was enabling all countries to gain access to the statistical data they needed in order to assess their position in the world economy.

3. The report of the Commission made no mention of the fact that the Statistical Office was planning to establish an electronic data bank which would make it possible to compare the statistics of various developing countries so as

to identify trends in economic development. Such a bank would be very useful during the Second United Nations Development Decade.

4. The programme of work for the next five years was described in chapter X of the Commission's report. Chapter XIV contained twelve resolutions adopted by the Commission, and chapter XV contained a draft resolution to be considered by the Economic and Social Council.

5. Mr. MARSH (Jamaica) noted that the Conference of European Statisticians was working on environmental statistics, a new field in which it was probably difficult to make comparisons. As the Statistical Office was collaborating in that project, he would like to know its views on the subject.

6. Mr. LOFTUS (Director, Statistical Office) replied that environmental statistics were closely connected with social statistics. The Statistical Office was collaborating with the Conference of European Statisticians in the preparatory stages of the project by asking countries to provide information on their priorities in that field. The information obtained would be made available to the Conference.

7. Mr. LISOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the Commission seemed to have accomplished some highly satisfactory work at its sixteenth session. It had contributed to the development of international statistical services, particularly by attempting to rationalize the collection and presentation of data within the United Nations system. His delegation supported the decisions taken by the Commission and welcomed the results obtained.

8. It was encouraging to see that the Commission's work, as described in the report (E/4938), was fully consonant with the relevant General Assembly and Economic and Social Council resolutions. There had been cases in which other Secretariat departments had allowed considerations or proposals which bore little relation to the directives issued by the competent bodies to appear in documents prepared on behalf of the Secretary-General.

9. The results of the Commission's session and in particular the contents of its report showed that the Statistical Office, the Commission and the statistical offices of all the United Nations agencies were making a considerable effort to deal with the very important problem of statistical analysis in the economic and social fields. A high standard of economic and social statistical analysis was an essential factor for determining the measures to be taken at the international and national levels to ensure the economic and social development of all countries. One tangible result obtained was the preparation of statistical indicators of the distribution of national income and of social progress,

which would be of great assistance in future United Nations activities.

10. The statistical activities of the United Nations organs and specialized agencies were increasing rapidly every year. However, that rapid growth was accompanied by overlapping and duplication. The Statistical Commission and the Statistical Office were attempting to remedy those defects in the system. Chapter IV of the report gave some idea of the measures already taken in that connexion and of those planned for the future. The Statistical Commission had made a positive effort in that direction. However, his delegation felt that the Council itself should take a decision aimed at supporting those practical measures and strengthening the Commission's authority. In that decision, the Council could draw attention to the need to give the Commission a greater role in the co-ordination of United Nations statistical activities. It might also propose that the statistical programmes of the United Nations and the specialized agencies should not be carried out until they had been examined by the Commission. Lastly, the Council should request the Commission to promote the development of a unified system of data collection. Such a decision would help to rationalize the statistical activities of United Nations bodies. The Soviet delegation was ready to co-operate constructively with other delegations interested in drawing up a draft resolution on that question.

11. It would also be useful if the Statistical Office and the Statistical Commission could co-operate more actively with various international statistical institutes outside the United Nations system.

12. The activities of the proposed International Computing Centre were defined very broadly in chapter IV of the Commission's report. It must be acknowledged, however, that a final decision had yet to be taken on establishing the centre and it was too early at the present stage to define its activities and functions.

13. In the draft resolution appearing in chapter XV, and also in other chapters of the report, there were various provisions that could affect technical assistance. He believed that in all spheres, including statistics, United Nations technical assistance must be channelled through UNDP. It was essential to bear that principle in mind when preparing documentation.

14. Mr. McCARTHY (United Kingdom), commenting on paragraph 118 of the report (E/4938), which indicated the reasons why the Commission preferred to hold its next session in February 1972 instead of the autumn of 1972, said that his delegation considered that those reasons were valid. An interval of over two years between the sessions would make it difficult to maintain continuity in the work of the Commission. It had been said that the volume of work of the Statistical Office was steadily growing, and if the Commission's proposal were adopted it would expand still further. However, that would be the case as long as the Commission existed. He thought that it would be advisable for the Council to endorse the Commission's proposal and for the Statistical Office to take due account of it pending a final decision.

15. Mr. TARDOS (Hungary) said that chapter II of the report gave an interesting account of developments in

national accounting. In Hungary, the Central Statistical Office was greatly concerned with that question and in 1968 an improved system of national accounting had been introduced. His delegation was pleased that the Statistical Commission had recommended circulating a description of the System of Material Product Balances (MPS). A definition of the links between MPS and the System of National Accounts (SNA) could provide the basis for an integrated system and permit comparisons within a country or between different countries. The Commission had recommended that data, in current and constant prices, on aggregates in respect of the production, supply and disposition of goods and services should also be gathered and published in terms of the SNA from countries using the MPS and in terms of the MPS from countries using the SNA and that that should be done more than once every five years. His delegation supported the proposal that there should be separate statistics for distribution services and for other services. It was important to clarify terminology and specify indicators relevant to the various services available to the public. The Statistical Office should review the classification established, without however changing the basic structure of the systems.

16. Analysing external trade statistics by mode of transport (see E/4938, para. 99) was a costly method which entailed the risk of error. The appropriate data should be related to transport rather than to external trade statistics.

17. With regard to the draft resolution in chapter XV of the report, he thought that it would be wrong to underestimate the importance of improving vital statistics for developing countries; however, the United Nations limited resources would no doubt be better utilized if they were expended in assessing the progress achieved over the past decade. His delegation hoped that the financial implications of the vital statistics project would not be excessive and that it could accordingly vote in favour of it. It would also like to know the financial implications of the 34 *ad hoc* projects of high priority listed in paragraph 115 of the report, and the number of projects of low priority. It would be preferable to concentrate on a few projects of high priority.

18. Mr. SKATARETIKO (Yugoslavia) said he would like to know why the preambular part of the draft resolution in chapter XV of the report, the purpose of which was to facilitate attainment of the objectives of the Second United Nations Development Decade, referred to General Assembly resolution 1710 (XVI), which had been adopted in 1961.

19. Mr. LOFTUS (Director, Statistical Office) said the resolution had been mentioned because it stressed statistical requirements, which had not been so strongly emphasized in the resolution dealing with the Second Development Decade. It was only after the Committee for Development Planning had studied the question in detail that emphasis had been placed on the very real need for an effort in the statistical field, as many plans and programmes had previously been prepared without sufficient account being taken of the necessary data. The Statistical Commission, being aware of that state of affairs, had consequently stressed the need for preparing essential basic statistics.

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.