Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the UN House in Beirut, headquarters of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. We appreciate your interest in looking into statistics on gender issues, and in particular for attending the UNFPA sponsored workshop on engendering statistics.

The proportion of sex-disaggregated data has significantly increased over the past years. However, engendering statistics does not stop there. Engendering statistics means looking into social relationships that reflect ideological, historical, cultural, ethnic, religious and economic factors. Engendering statistics means redesigning statistical surveys and introducing new statistical indicators. Engendering statistics means getting on the pulse of the societal development, and it is not possible without an intensive dialogue between producers and users of official statistics.

In almost all countries we can find organizations that advocate for equal opportunity for women and men and for implementing measures to ensure full recognition of women’s and men’s interests and needs. Policy makers, women’s machineries and civil society activists face this demand that puts emphasis on needs for more of gender relevant statistics. It is our role to engender official statistics. However, I have also to emphasise that as official statisticians, we should remain professional and impartial. Our role is not to advocate, but to provide scientifically sound data of high quality. This is valid for official statistics in general, but in particular when we touch on hot and sensitive issues of our societies. Therefore, engendering statistics requires attention and participation not only experts on gender statistics, but also specialists from other subject-matter areas and in particular managers at all levels of the statistical office.

Statistics relevant to gender issues goes far beyond demographic data and basic social indicators. We need to cover aspects of economic life including unpaid work and informal sectors, including unpaid work of members of agricultural households. We have to cover aspects of inequalities and gaps in labour force participation, income and poverty, ownership, holdings of production tools. Statistics has to provide data on participation in management and decision making. It is not easy to engender economic statistics, if we use the optic of traditional indicators. It is important to begin with issues and then to translate them into indicators and design of statistical surveys.

Let’s take an example of a very technical area that are information and communication technologies. Our traditional indicators, in particular those included in the MDG framework, focus on supply based statistics originating from telecom operators and vendors of technology. However, if we look at information and communication technologies as a social phenomenon, enabling access to knowledge, broader participation and enlarged democracy, we conclude that it is important to look at household surveys and censuses as sources of data. Then we can look into gender gaps in access to information through those technological means, the time used by women and men for seeking and retrieving information, the types of information retrieved, the usage of e-services and a support of technology to social life. The technology supports application of one of the fundamental human rights, the right to information, and we are able to capture statistical evidence on this subject.

Similarly we can approach statistics on banking, real estate and other subject-matter areas.

We can apply the methods looking into statistics on women and men for benefits of statistics on youth and elderly, and we can generalise the approaches to all social groups of special interest.
Obviously, we should never minimize our engagement in traditional social subjects, like health, education, culture, as well as violence and crime. Those, who are vulnerable, may be victims of crime, and statisticians need to put in place methods of data collection for statistics of crime and violence that captures the necessary data on one hand, but also respects the victims, their culture and dignity on the other side. Therefore, and in particular in our region, we need to adapt methods and techniques used for statistics on gender based violence and crime statistics to the needs and culture of our region.

The recent years witnessed many successes in engendering official statistics. Sex disaggregated data are available in a large proportion. Numerous surveys included data related to participation, gender based violence, gender gaps and other gender issues. However, there is still a way forward we have to do, and I would like to thank you for your professional interest in engendering official statistics. I wish you a lot of success in your future work. At the same time, I would like to ask you to be ready to share your experience with colleagues from other countries and to become active participants in capacity development undertakings in our region.

Allow me to wish you a successful workshop. On behalf of ESCWA I would like to ensure you that we pay a special attention to engendering official statistics, and we are always open to your suggestions and requests for assistance, and we will do our best, together with partners from other UN agencies and regional organizations, to support you in your future work. I trust that you will carry on complex tasks of providing relevant, reliable and impartial statistics on gender issues in line with professional and scientific principles of statistics. I know that it is not an easy role.

Finally, allow me to wish you an enjoyable stay in Beirut, and a hope that you will have the best experience with the traditional Lebanese hospitality. I also hope that you will find the hospitality of the UN House, and do not hesitate to ask any of use for assistance, should a need occur.

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