UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Training workshop of the UNESCO international Working Group on Media Statistics (WGMS)

Opening remarks by
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you in Paris at this Training workshop of the UNESCO International Working Group on Media Statistics (WGMS), organized by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. The purpose of this one-week workshop is to enable the launching of a pilot survey on media using the new survey instruments developed by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics in collaboration with UNESCO's Communication and Information Sector. I am very impressed to see that almost all of the 26 countries selected for this pilot exercise are represented here today.

Just last month, on 20 October 2010, the United Nations celebrated the first World Statistics Day in acknowledgment of the service provided by the professionals that you are, and to help strengthen the awareness and trust of the public in official statistics. On this occasion, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr Ban Ki-Moon, "encourage[d] the international community to work with the United nations to enable all countries to meet their statistical needs". The work that we are carrying out together is geared precisely towards this objective. Our hope is to address, to the extent possible, the huge disparities among Member States in terms of media sector-specific statistical capacity and to ensure the regular collection of a set of internationally standardized media statistics in countries across the globe.
The new UIS instruments for collecting media statistics - a revised questionnaire accompanied by an instruction manual - take as their starting point UNESCO’s Media Development Indicators (MDIs) Framework, which is a diagnostic tool for assessing media landscapes at national level and identifying media development needs. Designed through a vast international consultation, the Media Development Indicators were endorsed by the Intergovernmental Council of UNESCO’s International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) in 2008 and are now being applied in pilot countries worldwide. The reports stemming from their application provide an in-depth analysis of the media sector in each country and propose evidence-based recommendations to guide policy making in order to create enabling environments for free, independent and pluralistic media. The availability of internationally comparable statistics in the fields of both print and broadcast media will help to fully operationalize the Media Development Indicators framework, addressing certain gaps that have been identified in the media-related data available at national level.

The new media survey instruments will also contribute to addressing emerging global monitoring needs stemming from the World Summits on the Information Society (WSIS). They will provide a methodologically sound baseline for benchmarking progress in the achievement of the media-related goals set within the framework of WSIS Action Line C9: Media, for which UNESCO was designated as sole facilitator. With both the Media Development Indicators framework and the new set of media statistics at their disposal, governments, intergovernmental
organizations and civil society will be equipped with the necessary tools to, on the one hand, strengthen a unified multi-stakeholder approach for the implementation of Action line 9: Media and, on the other, to measure the extent to which their objectives are being met.

In a more indirect manner, the newly devised media statistics will also help to monitor advancement in achieving the Millennium Development Goals at the national, regional and international levels. While media are not mentioned explicitly in any of the eight time-bound targets set at the 2000 UN Millennium Summit, it is clear that the Millennium Development Goals cannot be achieved without an active involvement of the media. Media can help ensure transparency and the accountability of decision-makers to act upon their promises. They can empower citizens with information that enables them to make informed choices and actively participate in democratic and development processes. They can expose cases of bad governance and monitor that the government is duly playing its role of guardian of the public interest. However, the media can only fulfill this potential if the environment, and in particular the legal and regulatory framework in which they operate, are conducive to freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity. Assessing whether or not this is the case is a significant aspect of the new media questionnaire developed by UNESCO.

Finally, the revision of UNESCO’s media statistics questionnaire was driven by the belief that in order for statistical information to serve effectively as a tool for policy advocacy, it is necessary to
constantly seek to improve the quality of the data collected and regularly adapt survey instruments to the current realities in order to ensure their relevance. In the case of the media, this is all the more the case given the dynamic nature of the communications environment. The ongoing digital revolution has had a profound impact on the media landscape, blurring the boundaries between the media, telecoms and information technology sectors. The dizzying growth of the Internet, digitization, the development of social media and increasing market deregulation are just some of the aspects that force us to rethink the way in which we approach and analyze the media. The new questionnaire therefore touches upon issues such as ICT penetration, Internet connectivity and the switch-off from analog to digital broadcasting transmission to take into account these recent developments.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The elaboration of these new survey instruments for assessing the media sector would be of little use if UNESCO could not count on the support and cooperation of national statistics institutions such as those that you represent. National statisticians play a vital role not only in the collection of data and the completion of UIS’s surveys; they also provide valuable feedback for the definition of new standards, indicators and methodologies, pointing out specific country-related challenges that may be met in their application.
As you know, following a first field-test application of the new media survey instruments in five countries (Cameroon, Canada, Costa Rica, Jordan and Ukraine), which enabled the fine-tuning of some of their aspects, UNESCO is now planning their piloting in the 26 countries that you represent.

In this view, throughout the coming week, you will be provided with detailed guidance for the accurate completion of the new UNESCO questionnaire; you will be familiarized with the newly standardized concepts involved in order to ensure comparability of media statistics across countries; finally, you will be given the opportunity to exchange best practices on your national approach to media data collection. Once the training completed, the survey pilot will be launched in December.

I wish you a successful training session and hope it will give rise to productive exchanges among you. I also count on you, once the pilot exercise launched, to share with UNESCO any difficulties you may meet in the application of the survey instruments and to suggest possible refinements to them before the launching of the regular UNESCO media survey from 2012 onwards. Your insights will be crucial to ensure the quality of the statistical information collected.

I thank you in advance for your collaboration and wish you every success in this important project.