

## Remarks

**Ms. Hiroko Ota, Minister of State for Economic and Fiscal Policy, Japan:** Thank you for the kind introduction. Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. Sorry to interrupt to your symposium but I have the pleasure of making a few comments for the international symposium. We are indeed privileged to have Dr. Paul Cheung from the United Nations Statistics Division as well as the other distinguished statisticians. We are indeed very honored and privileged to have all of you. I will also thank all of the guests for the symposium.

The Japanese Statistics Act was formulated right after the Second World War and there have been no major amendments henceforth. But in May this year, the first time in 60 years we have seen a wholesale revision of the law, so we have seen the amendment of the law as well the new establishment of the Statistical Commission. So we have come at the historic turning point for the statistical system in Japan.

It goes without saying that the relevance and importance of statistics have become increasingly important. More recently we often hear of the evidence-based policy making. We need to base ourselves on objective data and analysis as well as research in trying to formulate the policies as well as to execute the policies. These are thought to be taken for granted all over the world. The necessary foundation for such policy making would be well organized and systematic statistical information, not only for the government but also for business, households as well investors who make their choice and options everyday.

Statistical information is something critical and crucial for their decision making. Thus statistics is invaluable infrastructure for our economic activities. Having excellent statistical information would decide the success of a country and also to decide the credibility and reputation of Japan in the international community. Overseas, we have the many countries developing their own systems and mechanisms. For instance, in the UK, ever since the 1990s, they have shifted from government-based statistics to more of a statistics for the rational decision-making as essential information for the people. There has been dependence given to this Statistics Bureau as well as to improve on the transparency, and also national statisticians as well as statistics commissions have been established in many different countries.

But in Japan, for the 60 years after the war, even though there have been dramatic changes in society as well as in economic structures, the statistical system has not been able to respond in an appropriate manner. Because we have a decentralized system in Japan and under such a system, the statistics as a whole was not able to respond in a systematic manner in view of the changes happening in the economy and society. We have 55 designated statistical surveys which are thought be important statistical surveys, which have been mostly designated up until the year 1960, and there are only five new statistics that have been designated in the past two decades.

For instance, in the area of services where jurisdiction is being held by different ministries, the statistics were not able to respond fully and sufficiently. We did not see sufficient coordination between the derived statistics and the sourced statistics, for instance for the GDP statistics. In order to bring about a breakthrough, we have seen energetic discussion and debate and that has culminated in the total revision for the Statistics Act, the first time in 60 years.

Under the new law, we have a Statistics Commission being established, which has merged the Statistics Council and the Advisory Committee for the SNA under the Cabinet Office, which will be serving as a control tower. As Chair of the new Commission, we have asked Dr. Takeuchi, the authority in statistics in Japan to serve at the helm.

For the reform of statistics, it is crucial to introduce the viewpoint of the users so on top of the statisticians, we have economists as well as experts on demographics as well as economists based upon government and the Bank of Japan and other first-rate people who are now members of the new Statistics Commission. I have hoped that you will be able to see very active debate on the governance as well as the statistics to be developed based upon policy needs and social needs. Thank you very much for your kind attention.