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PROPOSED DEFINITIONS OF SELECTED TERMS FOR USE BY THE STATISTICAL COMMISSION

Report of the Secretary-General

1. At the nineteenth session of the Commission, there was some discussion concerning the meaning attached to a number of terms that were frequently used in Commission documents and appeared frequently in international statistical programmes and publications. The terms included "recommendations" and "guidelines".
2. Definitions of those terms were discussed by the Sub-Committee on Statistical Activities of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination at its eleventh session, March 1977. It was noted that the usage of the terms varied among the organizations and that they were used as general terms rather than as uniquely statistical terms. It was thought that there was probably no single "commonly understood" meaning for the terms, and some doubt was expressed about the possibility of developing definitions that would meet the needs of all organizations in the international statistical system. The suggestion was made, however, that the usage of the terms by the Commission could be formalized and definitions adopted for use within the context of the work of the Commission.
3. At its seventh session, the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Co-ordination of the Commission agreed that it would be desirable to define the terms "recommendations" and "guidelines" and additionally "technical report" and "handbook" or "manual". It was agreed that the definitions should be brief. The following preliminary definitions were developed by the Working Group for use at the twenty-first session of the Commission (E/CN.3/502, para.65):

"(a) Recommendations are technical specifications issued by the Commission and proposed for adoption and implementation by national statistical offices to the extent possible;

"(b) Guidelines are technical specifications issued by the Commission and proposed for use by national statistical offices in their own work in developing statistics;

"(c) Technical reports relating to statistics are working documents containing useful material on classifications, concepts, definitions etc., for information, that have not as yet received sufficient endorsement to qualify as guidelines or recommendations;

"(d) Manuals or handbooks are publications that provide guidance to countries on the development of statistics relating, in particular, to methods, sources etc."

4. The Working Group agreed that the definitions should be refined by the United Nations Statistical Office and presented to the Commission at its twentieth session. Further consideration of the above definitions by the Statistical Office has led to modifications in the definitions of "manuals" or "handbooks" and "technical reports". The modified definitions are set out below:

Manuals or handbooks are publications that provide guidance to countries on the development of statistics through the provision of comprehensive descriptions of procedures, methods, sources and other related matters in a broad area of statistics or a major statistical process, e.g., sampling or index number construction.

Technical reports are documents or publications that contain material on (a) classifications, concepts, definitions and other related matters that have not as yet received sufficient endorsement to qualify as recommendations or guidelines; (b) procedures, methods, sources and other related matters that are not sufficiently comprehensive to be considered manuals or handbooks; or (c) matters of interest and potential usefulness to the international statistical community, e.g., studies on statistical organization, country codes and weights and measures conversions.

ACTION BY THE COMMISSION

5. The Commission may wish to adopt for use in its own work the definitions for recommendations and guidelines given in paragraph 3 above and for manuals or handbooks and technical reports in paragraph 4 above.