

The ISI and the United Nations Statistical Commission

The International Statistical Institute, ISI, extends heartiest congratulations on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of UN Statistical Commission.

The ISI's mission is to lead, support and promote the understanding, development and good practice of statistics worldwide, by providing the core global network for statistics. Our motto, Statistical Science for a Better World, is promoted by all of our Associations including the International Association for Official Statistics.

The first of the biennial ISI Sessions (now called World Statistics Congress) was held in Rome in 1887. In 1938, the ISI went into hibernation until 1947, when the next Session was held in New York. Stuart Rice (USA, ISI-President from 1947–1953), the primary organizer, strived to make the ISI the umbrella for *all* kinds of statistical interests and activities, which is reflected by the current seven ISI Associations as well as the breadth of conferences, meetings and publications. Before WW II, the ISI sought to influence governmental statistical agencies by encouraging uniformity in statistical definitions and data collection. This role was taken over by the United Nations. The mission of the ISI became international communication among statisticians rather than among governments, and supporting the international promotion and development of research, statistical capacity and good practice across all of statistics.

In three ways, the history of the ISI intersects with the history of the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC). Similar links may be identified with regional and specialized UN bodies, such as the Conference of European Statisticians, FAO, ILO, UNESCO and others.

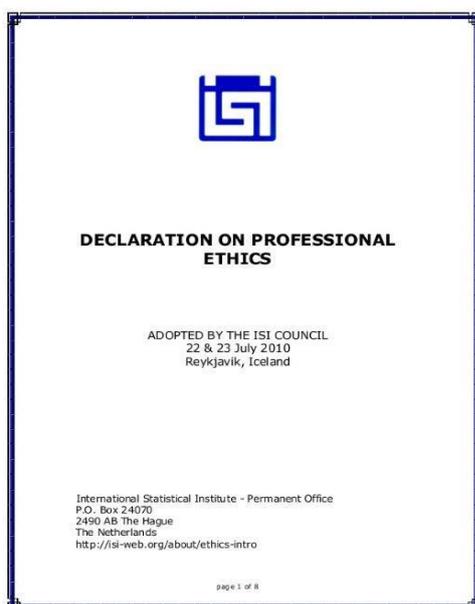
The first intersection is institutional. ISI has had consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations since 1949 and therefore with the UN Statistical Commission. At the occasion of the 44th UN Statistical Commission meeting in 2013, the ISI leadership team met with Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations, to discuss collaborations between the UN Statistical Commission and the ISI.



ISI Officials' meeting with Secretary General of UN in 2013; LTR: Jae C. Lee (ISI President, 2011-2013), Ban ki-Moon (UN Secretary General, 2007-2016), Vijay Nair (ISI President-Elect, 2011-2013), Ada van Krimpen (ISI Director).

The second type of intersection is through people. Many ISI leaders were not only involved with the ISI, but also with official, intergovernmental bodies of international statistics. Sir Harry Campion is an example. He helped setting up the UNSD and was its first head in 1946/47, and ISI President 1963-67. Stuart Rice is another excellent example. Not only was he ISI President, he was also the first chairman of the UN Statistical Commission. Other prominent statisticians who played various leading roles in the ISI, as well as chaired the UNSC, include Idenburg (The Netherlands), Mahalanobis (India), Rao (India), Bjerve (Norway), Korolev (USSR), Vera Nyitrai (Hungary), Begeer (The Netherlands), Jarque (Mexico), and Kawasaki (Japan).

A third, particularly interesting type of intersection is to do with statistical ethics. In 1979, the



ISI established a Committee on a Code of Ethics for Statisticians, which drafted the ISI Declaration on Professional Ethics. After due consideration and deliberation the ISI General Assembly adopted the Declaration in 1985. Less than a decade later (1994), the UNSC would endorse the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (FPO). While there is no proof that the FPO were partly inspired by the Declaration, there are remarkable similarities between the two documents. However, the Declaration and the FPO have different purposes and address different audiences. The FPO are directed at governments (and in a sense at societies as a whole), partly at national statistical offices and other national data collecting agencies and implicitly at national statisticians and staff working in offices for official statistics. The Declaration is directed at individual statisticians. It may be noted, however, that there are no contradictions between the

Declaration and the FPO. Although there are topics that are dealt with in both the Declaration and the FPO, particularly the use of scientific methods, confidentiality of basic data and transparency of methods, the Declaration is much more detailed in prescribing professional behaviour regarding these issues.

The ISI's close connections with UNSC continue to grow and evolve, through groups and individuals. The challenges and opportunities of big data and data science are as vital to UNSC as to all ISI members, individual and organisational. Many statistical groups and individuals across the world are working on aspects of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's), as reflected in the variety of sessions on SDG's at WSC 2019. The ISI is involved in the UNSC's Global Network of Institutions for Statistical Training.

We express our aspirations to continue working together in statistics and data for a better world.

ISI Executive Committee

With thanks to W.F.M. de Vries for his contribution to this article.