Opening Statement

23RD UN/INTOSAI SYMPOSIUM
UN Post-2015 Development Agenda: The Role of SAIs and Means of Implementation for Sustainable Development

Vienna, 2 March 2015

Your Excellency, Dr. Heinz Fischer, President of Austria,
Secretary-General of INTOSAI Mr. Josef Moser,
Ambassador Martin Sajdik and President of the UN Economic and Social Council,
Ms. Carman Lapointe, my colleague and Under-Secretary-General for the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services,
Mr. Zhang Tong, Deputy Auditor General of China, and Representative of the INTOSAI Chair,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be back here in the beautiful city of Vienna for the 23rd UN/INTOSAI Symposium.

I thank INTOSAI for collaborating with the United Nations in organizing this important event.

The 23rd UN/INTOSAI Symposium is timely.

Its overall theme “the role of Supreme Audit Institutions and means of implementation for the sustainable development” reflects the importance the United Nations and our INTOSAI partners attach to supreme audit institutions in advancing sustainable development.

In September this year, world leaders will convene in New York at the United Nations Summit to adopt the post-2015 development agenda. This universal agenda, for implementation by developed as well as developing countries, will aspire to bring about transformative change -
to how we grow our economies, advance social development, fight climate change and protect our planet.

With 17 sustainable development goals - SDGs for short - and 169 related targets proposed for further elaboration and likely inclusion, the post-2015 development agenda will be an ambitious, visionary and historic one.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in his Synthesis Report submitted to the Member States last December, captured this agenda through an integrated set of six essential elements:

(i) ensuring dignity - by ending poverty and fighting inequality;
(ii) focusing on people – in order to ensure healthy lives and inclusion of women and children;
(iii) achieving prosperity – by growing a strong and inclusive economy;
(iv) protecting our planet and ecosystems for all societies and our children;
(v) advancing justice by promoting safe and peaceful societies and strong institutions; and
(vi) strengthening partnerships to catalyse global solidarity for sustainable development.

Driving this ambitious and transformative agenda is our shared desire for a better and more sustainable future.

The final document of the post-2015 development agenda is being elaborated through an intensive consultation and negotiation process, starting from January and continuing every month through September. My department has been coordinating UN system technical inputs to this intergovernmental process.

Importantly, much of the ongoing deliberation is focused on monitoring, review and implementation, including means of implementation.

There is growing expectation that the 17 goals and 169 targets are likely to be the core of the post-2015 development agenda.

However, successful implementation of this agenda will, by no means, be an easy undertaking. It will require an enabling environment, including accountable institutions and the rule of law.

It is worth noting that an honest and responsive government was identified among the top priorities by the 7 million people who participated in the online survey titled “My World”.

Indeed, Member States have heard the call for improved institutions. Goal 16 of the proposed SDGs aims to “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.”
Member States and the public at large have both underscored the critical role of effective and accountable institutions in implementing the post-2015 development agenda.

The Secretary-General further emphasized the critical role of monitoring frameworks, drawing attention to oversight mechanisms such as supreme audit institutions and oversight functions by legislature.

Supreme audit institutions (SAI) are at the core of effective, accountable and inclusive institutions.

In this regard, the lessons learned during the last fifteen years of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will serve us all, as we contemplate the challenges ahead. We look forward to hearing more about those lessons from my colleague, Under-Secretary-General Lapointe.

Looking ahead, I believe supreme audit institutions will play an even more important role in supporting the implementation of SDGs.

The SDGs are broader in scope, ranging from hunger, poverty, health, education, gender equality, to water and sanitation, to energy, economic growth, infrastructure, industrialisation, and to urbanisation, consumption, climate change, oceans and seas, our ecosystems, as well as means of implementation and global partnership.

As I just mentioned, SDG 16 addresses inclusive and accountable institutions.

As far as supreme audit institutions are concerned, I see three aspects relating to implementation of such a broad agenda.

First, given the competing demands for resources to implement SDGs and related targets, financial resources dedicated to SDGs must be utilized efficiently.

In this regard, supreme audit institutions will need to continue strengthening their traditional financial and compliance auditing functions to help ensure that public resources are allocated and spent efficiently and effectively for advancing the implementation of the SDGs.

Second, integration will be a critical challenge in the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda. This is by no means a new problem. We must learn from the past and avoid a silo mind-set and approach to implementation.

To this end, supreme audit institutions will need to devote more resources to performance audits, ensuring that public institutions perform their functions in a coherent and integrated manner, with accountability, efficiency, effectiveness, and economy.

Third, we anticipate that developing countries will require scaled-up support, including capacity building support.
The international community must therefore help developing countries enhance capacity to develop and strengthen the independence of supreme audit institutions for fostering public accountability.

As you may be aware, the General Assembly already issued a call to action when it adopted in December 2014 a resolution on *Promoting and fostering the efficiency, accountability, effectiveness and transparency of public administration by strengthening supreme audit institutions*.

By that resolution, the General Assembly calls upon Member States to “give due consideration to independence and capacity-building in respect of supreme audit institutions, and to the improvement of public accounting systems in the post-2015 development agenda.”

The Department of Economic and Social Affairs, working closely with key partners, including INTOSAI, is committed to supporting national efforts, particularly in developing countries, to foster efficient, transparent and accountable public governance and administration.

This joint Symposium is one such effort. I consider this Symposium a good opportunity for broad discussions and fruitful exchanges on what lessons learned and advice national supreme audit institutions can give.

In the field of audit and inclusive and accountable governance, the international community will look upon organisations such as INTOSAI and its strong membership to help disseminate successful country experiences on what works and what is needed to change the course.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to conclude my remark, as I did last month in New York at a panel discussion on supreme audit institutions, with one more quote from the Secretary-General’s Synthesis Report.

I quote:

“We must now embrace a culture of shared responsibility … The new paradigm of accountability that we seek is … one of all actors…Governments, international institutions, private sector actors and organizations of civil society — and in all countries, the people themselves. This is the real test of people-centred, planet-sensitive development”

End of quote.
I thank you for your attention.