

**H.E. Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, Minister of
Culture, Youth and Community Development, UAE**

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good Morning and welcome to the United Arab Emirates and its capital city Abu Dhabi. We are delighted that you are here. Although your ambitious agenda may exhaust you, I hope that you can save some energy for exploring our city and our country. We are proud of this global crossroads and trust that you will enjoy your time in Abu Dhabi and the United Arab Emirates.

As you all know, today is World Statistics Day. The theme of this year's celebration is "**Better Data, Better Lives.**" This is a perfect context for holding this second global conference on Big Data. I am hopeful that your sessions will help educate us all about how Big Data is shaping and improving our lives. I hope that the guidelines you develop will direct our use of Big Data to enhance our knowledge of our socio-economic environment and to improve our ability to make sound decisions. You are conferring at a time when a UN panel has called for a data revolution, in their words: "**by taking advantage of new technology, crowd sourcing, and improved connectivity**" (end quote). Your conference will help governments, businesses, and decision makers in all fields to participate in, and benefit from, this data revolution.

My own personal experience with Big Data began recently at the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Community Development as we have been preparing a National Youth Empowerment Strategy. We found

that data available from traditional sources such as censuses and surveys were not entirely sufficient for our needs. Census and survey data have always been gathered for precise purposes, and those purposes were fulfilled by seeking very specific data. We noticed that Big Data, on the other hand, has no limits and no particular purpose. Dealing with Big Data entails clever data mining and imaginative exploitation far more than organized gathering. We have been struck by the vast and growing variety of digital data and concluded, like most of you, that engaging the almost bewildering variety of Big Data demands a far more flexible mindset than that required by the traditional data sources.

It is clear to us that the more we recognize the differences between the traditional data sources and Big Data sources, the more we will come to realize what the velocity, volume, and variety of Big Data can do for our work on the Youth Empowerment Strategy. Our research team recently turned to a Big Data analysis of social media to substantiate some of its research findings. The results of the team's foray into social media have inspired the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Community Development to champion the cause of Big Data. We believe that innovative, creative, and intelligent use of Big Data will give us insights that will significantly strengthen our ability to make sound decisions. Those insights will help us empower young people and guarantee them the conditions for happy, fulfilled, and productive lives. Those insights can also help to fuel growth and development in all aspects of our socio-economic lives.

As we continue to look at the potential of Big Data in cultural and social research, it has become apparent to us that Big Data itself is an important component of the infrastructure for innovation and

creativity. And we are primed for innovation because this is the National Year of Innovation in the United Arab Emirates. Unlike a census or a survey, Big Data is new and potentially world-shaking. The time is right for us to imaginatively confront data and information that we never had had access to, or the computational resources for handling it, before.

We should be successful because it has been the good fortune of the United Arab Emirates to create itself in the digital age. His Highness the President, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al-Nahayan leads a country determined (to use Sheikh Khalifa's words) **“to keep up with modern technology and...fast-paced technological advancement.”** We are working diligently to study the examples and absorb the guidelines that will allow us to keep up with the rapid developments in Big Data and, more important, to master the use of Big Data. We are confident that the more we know about our culture, our young people, and our communities, the better we will be informed to create policies and institute programs that will enrich the well-being of our population.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

With rapid developments occurring in Big Data, the field is still relatively new. We should seize this opportunity to make sure the field is, as it should be, a model of creativity and innovation. It should not be hampered by lack of cooperation or bureaucratic rigidity or infighting. We should also understand that Big Data analysis is still not perfect – that better methods of analysis and stronger ethical standards are needed. Because countries with more resources will benefit more from the potential access to and

use of Big Data, we must develop ways of sharing the power of Big Data with less fortunate countries to prevent any further inequalities or divides. We must also encourage cooperation between academic institutions, technology companies, businesses, and statistical organizations in order to produce better methods and better technology tools for collecting, storing, transporting, and analyzing Big Data. We must attempt to create a global set of standards in this regard. There must also be concern for individual privacy, for data protection and data integrity, and for educating the general public about the role of Big Data in improving our lives.

Education and training in this new field is also important. It is encouraging that many universities now offer academic degrees in the field, many times in cooperation with the world of work. Demand for graduates is growing rapidly. The field is also very attractive for entrepreneurs and imaginative initiatives.

I am pleased to see from your conference program that you are thinking about all those issues in the broadest possible terms. I support your efforts to analyze these issues within an international framework and to base your work on clear standards that will help countries around the world achieve the potential of Big Data in promoting economic growth and development, enhancing research and discovery, and keeping pace with innovations around the globe.

The nature of your work and your presence at this conference are cause for great optimism. Data, research, and innovation fuel economic growth. Those three areas of endeavor are closely linked. Work in these areas must be enhanced by international cooperation. Although we routinely marvel at the interconnected nature of our

world today, we still must exert some effort to take advantage of the opportunity for sharing ideas and building on each other's insights and successes. You are seizing the opportunity today, and I hope that you will continue to cooperate both regionally and internationally. I believe strongly that our success in building knowledge economies in our countries will depend on achieving the data revolution envisioned by the United Nations; on the ability to collect, store, and analyze Big Data and to turn the results into actions that drive economic progress; on strong partnerships between all segments of society; and on an environment that allows for keeping pace with the latest developments in technology and data-driven processes around the world.

We therefore welcome you warmly to this **“Second Global Conference on Big Data for Official Statistics.”** By hosting this conference, the United Arab Emirates continues to demonstrate its important role in promoting regional and international cooperation and in building networks that link technology, business, and government in mutually beneficial initiatives. And please remember that as Big Data and data mining are the focus of your meetings, they are only tools, a means to an end that is defined as achieving better lives for people everywhere.

My best wishes to all of you for a very successful conference. And Happy World Statistics Day!

Thank you.