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SIXTH MEETING OF THE STATISTICAL COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

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Opening Remarks

Gregory Scott

on behalf of Stefan Schweinfest

Director

United Nations Statistics Division

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

It is my honour and pleasure to greet you at this Sixth Meeting of the Statistical Commission for Africa. Although this time I was not able to join you in person, I have made sure the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) is well represented by my trusted colleague Mr. Greg Scott, who is our Inter-regional advisor on geospatial information. It is particularly important to me to send this personal message as my dear colleague and ‘brother’ Mr. Oliver Chinganya has recently taken over the leadership of the African Centre for Statistics in ECA and I want to publicly assure him and his team my full personal and UNSD’s full professional support for our joint challenging task to support all African countries to strengthen their national capacities.

Between our UN offices in New York and Addis Ababa, we have been making all efforts to coordinate our work effectively. We each bring our own expertise and strengths to this partnership. For quite a long time now, we have been aligning our data collection and technical cooperation activities with the aim of delivering the best possible service to the Member States. A prime example of this is the launch of the joint Programme on Statistics and Data under the 10th Tranche of the Development Account to strengthen national statistical systems for the follow-up and review of the SDGs. This cooperation project is ongoing and will culminate in 2020.

Distinguished delegates,

We have joined forces with ECA and the African Development Bank for the 2020 Round of census which is currently underway. It is our expectation that the implementation of the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme in Africa will exceed the 2010 census round when nine countries in Africa were not able to conduct a population and housing census. We, at UNSD, are committed to deliver all the support in achieving that goal.

Population and housing censuses are critical for the monitoring of the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. They provide an answer to “Who are we?” in terms of age, sex, education, labor force status, occupation and other crucial characteristics, as well as to “Where do we live?” in terms of housing, access to water, availability of essential facilities and access to the Internet. The answers to these questions provide a numerical profile of a nation that is the sine qua non of evidence-based decision-making at all levels.

Let me point out that the population and housing censuses evolved and changed significantly in the past decades. While a majority of countries in the 2020 round will conduct a “traditional” census, there is an increasing number of countries that will draw census small areas statistics from population registers and administrative sources and yet another set of countries will combine surveys, administrative sources and population registers for the purpose.

There are two major recommendations coming from the United Nations Statistical Commission for the 2020 Round of Census. First, the use of tablet computers and similar devices resulting in much more timely and efficient production of census statistics. Second, the necessity of producing geo-referenced small-area census statistics. This can be achieved by a meticulous preparation of the census field work and with the use of geo-referencing of housing units and their inhabitants with geographical coordinates. This is especially important for a number of African countries that are lacking census-support mechanisms, such as address registers, for example. Again, we already have successful examples in Africa from which we can draw lessons.

Dear colleagues,

The 2030 Agenda has an expansive scope and coverage. Evidence on how we are doing in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals is crucial to confidently chart a path forward. Therefore, there is a great demand for quality, open, timely, and sufficiently disaggregated data and statistics. While the demand for data is unprecedented, national capacities to produce data on various SDG indicators has not kept pace. Strengthening capacities therefore also requires bringing innovations and synergies across the data ecosystems and building partnerships among different stakeholders.

UNSD has taken steps in advancing innovative work streams. We are providing technical assistance to countries on establishing national data platforms. We are facilitating the integration of data and statistics with geospatial information. African countries are working with the United

Nations Statistics Division to develop their national data hubs for SDGs and data exchange at the global level. An e-learning platform is being launched that contains various tools on SDG indicators production and utilization. Through the United Nations World Data Forum, UNSD helps bring together technology and data leaders and practitioners to identify solutions and innovative tools to respond to the growing demand for data.

The international system can provide much needed resources for statistical capacity building, but this is not enough. Successful transformation of statistical systems to meet demand of the 2030 Agenda requires political leadership and national ownership. It requires complementary resources. To ensure that this happens, we need data champions at the national level to advocate the value of data and statistics. While big changes do not happen overnight, we only have 12 more years left to meet the 2030 deadline. I therefore urge the colleagues here working in data and statistics to understand this sense of urgency and redouble their efforts to meet the data needs of the 2030 Agenda.

Distinguished delegates,

I wish you a successful Commission session and I am certainly looking forward to learning about the outcomes of your deliberations.

Thank you.