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**SYMPOSIUM ON GOVERNANCE FOR IMPLEMENTING THE SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT COMMITMENTS IN AFRICA**

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Your excellencies, distinguished guests and colleagues,

It is my pleasure to address you today from the Statistics Division of the United Nations Headquarters in New York. I would like to thank the organizers for giving me the opportunity to share my thoughts on the very important topic of your meeting.

My key message is a simple one: Good Statistics and Data are a critical element of governance! Producing the right information and making it accessible to the right people at the right moment is key!

At their core, the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and Agenda 2063 both articulate a vision of shared prosperity through sustainable and equitable development and we are all called to work together towards these goals. However, working hard with the intent to realize a vision is not enough. We need to know if we are moving in the right direction, and if we are making sufficient progress.

Your excellencies, distinguished guests,

It is only through high quality and reliable data and statistics that we can confidently answer these questions. Data and statistics enable us to feel the pulse, so to speak, of our efforts to achieve sustainable development in Africa, and around the world. Like a dashboard in an aircraft informs a pilot, objective data informs you—leaders and policy makers—how far we must go, which route to take, and if we need any course correction to make it to our destination. It is therefore no surprise that in the SDG-era, there is an unprecedented demand for data to inform our programmes and policies and to measure progress, and there is a great sense of urgency to strengthen national statistical systems and data capacities.

The Statistics Division of UN DESA and the global statistical community have worked tirelessly over the last few years to this end, and I am proud to share some of our concrete successes: The Global Indicator Framework for the SDGs was adopted by the UN General Assembly in its resolution 71/313 earlier this year, establishing a global reference frame for systematically monitoring the SDGs. In the same resolution the UN General Assembly fully recognized the crucial importance of data for sustainable development and the urgent need to strengthen statistical capacities in countries. It is now our shared responsibility to ensure that all governments have the appropriate resources and capacities to produce the necessary data and that all decision makers have access to the data and statistics they need to be the most effective in moving towards achieving our common goals.

In January 2017, the United Nations Statistics Division organized the first ever UN World Data Forum on Sustainable Development data here in Africa. The Forum is a unique opportunity that brings together practitioners from various background such as information technology, geospatial information managers, data scientists, policy makers, and data users to identify solutions and innovative tools to respond to the unprecedented demand for data. It is therefore no surprise that a key outcome of this meeting was the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data. The Plan provides the global statistical community with the much-needed strategic roadmap for statistical capacity building in the SDG-era.

The Cape Town Global Action Plan is being implemented with actions at the global, regional and national level – from programmes to modernize and strengthen the role of national statistical authorities to important partnerships with businesses and civil society organizations to harness the power of all data sources. Key to the success of these activities is the full engagement of policy makers at all levels, to ensure the appropriate funding of statistical work and to be fully engaged users of data.

My office, the United Nations Statistics Division is working on many fronts to support the global efforts. We provide technical assistance on the establishment of national data platforms and on users' engagement strategies. We are also fostering collaboration between the geospatial and statistical communities to leverage the integration of statistics with geospatial information. We are also launching an e-learning platform, a Global Network on Statistical Training Institutes and we are working on a handbook on Statistical Organisation and Management.

Your excellencies, distinguished guests,

As we prepare for the Second World Data Forum in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, from 22 to 24 October 2018, I would like to take this opportunity to cordially invite you to attend. I strongly believe that participation of policy makers like yourself is vital to foster meaningful dialogue about the future of data and statistics in support of the implementation of the development agendas. I therefore hope to see many of you there next year shaping the discussions and the outcomes.

My final message to you concerns one particularly important partnership. It is the partnership between you—the leaders of your countries in the implementation of the Agendas—and your national statistical offices. As the custodians of data, the national statistical offices are

the key partners to lead and coordinate the national information systems. I would therefore encourage you to communicate with them and fully support them. I believe I can say from my long United Nations experience that substantive engagement between data users and data providers is absolutely critical for policies and interventions to be a success.

Thank you for your attention. I wish you all the best in your important deliberations.