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6th SDMX Global Conference
"SDMX for the Data Revolution"

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Distinguished Deputy Executive Secretary,
Dear Colleagues from around the world,

It is a true pleasure for me to welcome you all to this 6th Global SDMX Conference here in Addis Ababa, the capital of Africa. I have the honour to address you in my capacity as the current Chair of the seven SDMX Sponsor Agencies. First and foremost, I would like to express, in the name of all Sponsor Agencies, my gratitude to our colleagues from the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa under the leadership of its Executive Secretary Ms. Vera Songwe, so ably represented here by the distinguished Deputy Executive Secretary Ms. Giovanie Biha. Thank you also to my dear colleague and friend Mr. Oliver Chinganya, Director of the African Statistics Center, with whom we work so closely in many areas. He and his ECA team did a phenomenal job to organize and prepare this event. And, of course, I would also like to gratefully acknowledge our colleagues from the African Development Bank, under the leadership of Mr. Charles Lufumpa, for their important contribution to this Global Conference.

This year marks the 10-year anniversary of our SDMX Global Conferences and I am particularly pleased that for the first time we are having this Conference in the continent of Africa; and as a result, 49 African countries are represented here. Bringing the SDMX Global Conferences to the developing world has been an important strategy of the Global Sponsor Agencies since the last Global Conference which was held in Bangkok 2 years ago. It demonstrates our collective conviction that SDMX is a truly global tool to address the global challenges of today, such as for instance the 2030 United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda. I am very grateful that over 300 experts from National Statistical Offices, Central

Banks, other government institutions, international agencies, and the private sector from all parts of the world are assembled here to discuss and share their experiences.

SDMX started as an initiative by the seven Sponsor Agencies: the Bank for International Settlements, the European Central Bank, Eurostat, International Monetary Fund, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the United Nations, and the World Bank in 2001. The first SDMX specification was released in 2004. The Sponsor Agencies have built the standard, guidelines, and tools supporting it, and promoted its use for data and metadata exchange among both national and international statistical agencies. Since the beginning, SDMX was designed by sponsor agencies as a truly Global Public Good. A milestone in the acceptance of SDMX was achieved in 2008 when the United Nations Statistical Commission and the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA) adopted SDMX as the standard for data and metadata exchange. By now SDMX is a mature ISO standard and every day and every hour SDMX messages are traveling between central banks, statistical offices and international organisations around the world.

Especially the last few years have seen much progress in the SDMX world, with new tools being developed and data exchange ramping up. These developments couldn't be more timely. We often refer to these times as the 'data revolution', as rapid development in Information and Communication Technologies has created numerous new opportunities. This in turn has, however, also increased the expectations of users, which are, unfortunately, too often accompanied by reduced budgets. SDMX can help in this context, especially, with the reduction of the reporting burden. This has long been a concern of the statistical community, and SDMX finally offers a practical method of resolving the issue. Remarkably, this reduction of reporting burden is accompanied by a significant improvement in timeliness, one of the key demands of our users. SDMX is also a rigorous standard, which makes it possible to impose strict requirements on the data in terms of quality and consistency. Implementation of SDMX has in many organisations and countries often spurred a cleanup exercise, which dramatically improved the quality and usability of disseminated data. Furthermore, SDMX makes it possible to build increasingly complex systems from ready-made building blocks, which works especially well in conjunction with other standards such as the Common Statistical Production Architecture. This has the potential to revolutionize the development of statistical information systems, dramatically reducing the costs of their development and maintenance while improving the quality of the output.

At the heart of SDMX is the idea that we can agree on a way to present and exchange statistical data and metadata in a standardized way. We have to be aware that by itself SDMX is not a wonder weapon, and will not, in a flash, enable all our systems to talk to each other. SDMX is about developing and agreeing structures that we can use to present data from the various statistical domains. These structures require a lot of patient work to develop. But once completed, they are our common professional language, enabling anyone to express their data in a standard, uniform way and, indeed, make it possible for our systems to talk to each other and for the data to travel effectively from their production site to the multiple users, who need them, at the national and international level. These Global Data Structure Definitions, or DSDs for short, are developed in cooperation between countries and international agencies. And I am particularly pleased that in this context the UN family has been able to bring in its strength from

our regional organisations and the specialized agencies.

Global data structure definitions initially took a long time to develop but now the pace of their implementation is accelerating. This is especially evident in macroeconomics. It was a major effort to develop DSDs for National Accounts, Balance of Payments, and Foreign Direct Investment. Building on the experience and reusing their concepts and code lists, work is now proceeding much faster on DSDs for Price Statistics and Labour Statistics. Work on a DSD for the System of Environmental Economic Accounting (SEEA) started recently but is proceeding rapidly, once again building on the macroeconomic structures. The SDMX Global Registry makes these global structures easily available for anyone to use.

In Europe, SDMX exchange is by now well established. Our colleagues at Eurostat, BIS, OECD, and the European Central Bank, as well as their counterparts in the countries, have integrated SDMX into their processing and reporting systems, which has made a tangible difference in the availability and timeliness of statistical data. These agencies have provided many of the very efficient tools that are now used all over the world to facilitate data exchange and dissemination.

Several initiatives have taken SDMX beyond its traditional core of international agencies and advanced countries. For the Millennium Development Goals, data exchange was set up with 15 countries and provided an extremely valuable experience. The efforts of the International Monetary Fund and African Development Bank have helped industrialize SDMX exchange in Africa. We have a session on the achievements of e-GDDS on Monday afternoon.

Thanks to the universality and cross-cutting nature of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, they offer a unique opportunity to expand the reach of SDMX beyond its geographical and substantive core. Indeed, we have observed enormous interest in and are asked a lot about SDMX for SDGs. A Working Group has been established that is developing SDMX standards for the SDGs, which aims to conduct pilot data exchange early next year, and release official structures towards the end of next year.

Interoperability is at the heart of SDMX. This standard is platform neutral, and indeed has proven to work very well across sometimes quite heterogeneous systems. Interoperability permits to use SDMX structures in a variety of contexts to support data collection, dissemination, data hubs, and others. SDMX tools are available as open source, allowing users to easily extend and build on them. These technologies and tools can of course help streamline and automate data exchange at national level just as well as with international agencies – indeed great efficiencies can be achieved implementing data exchange between the various government agencies at the national level. These technologies create a potential to even take SDMX beyond statistics.

I would like to conclude these introductory remarks by informing you that in 2015, the SDMX Sponsor Agencies have agreed on an important strategic document for the future, namely the Roadmap 2020, which identifies goals in the following four areas:
1. Strengthening the implementation of SDMX;
2. Making data usage easier via SDMX (especially for policy use);

3. Using SDMX to modernise statistical processes, as well as continuously improving the standards and IT infrastructure;
4. Improving communication in general, including a better interaction between international partners.

The Roadmap comes with an Action Plan, to which all Sponsor Agencies committed. Its details will be presented in the first substantive session, immediately following this opening session.

Dear Conference Participants,

From all of the above you can see that we need your help, expertise, knowledge, judgement and your ideas to develop and apply SDMX further. So we are looking very much forward to your active participation in this 6th Global Conference and thank you, once again, for having followed our invitation to join this global SDMX community.

We wish you all a professionally rewarding and at the same time enjoyable experience at this Global Conference.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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