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MR. WU HONGBO
UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

47th SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS STATISTICAL COMMISSION

Delivered by Mr. Lenni Montiel, Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development

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Madame Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

I am very pleased to welcome you to the 47th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission. Many of you have travelled far, coming from your respective capitals, to offer the United Nations your expertise in a true spirit of global cooperation.

The valuable work of this body today and over the past almost 70 years is recognized and appreciated by the entire United Nations family. Your focus on shared professional values, as codified in the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, has set the Statistical Commission apart. Thanks to your work on global standards, norms and methodologies the United Nations System has collected billions of development data, which tell the history of the past seven decades. In particular, I would like to take advantage of this moment to put on record the United Nations profound gratitude for the statistical communities' significant contributions to the monitoring of the Millennium Development Goals over the past 15 years. Your work culminated in the publication of the final MDG Report last July, which is an excellent example of effective cooperation among Member States and between national and international statistical systems.

Distinguished Delegates,

2015 has been a truly momentous year for the United Nations, with three major international summits on Financing for Development, Sustainable Development and Climate Change. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is bold and ambitious with 17 sustainable development goals and associated targets. These goals are action-oriented. They are universally applicable. They have to be implemented taking into account varying national realities, capacities and levels of development. The overarching objective is to leave no one behind.

And as the United Nations turns its attention to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, your role is more critical than ever before. Monitoring progress will build upon decades of your work in the field of indicators and development statistics. You are important stewards of this new era. The 2030 Agenda explicitly recognizes your role: Member States refer to "the global indicator framework, to be developed by the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators" to "be agreed by the Statistical Commission by March 2016 and adopted thereafter by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, in line with existing mandates".

We are all aware that under the Commission's guidance the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG) – composed of national statistical experts to ensure national ownership of the process - has worked incredibly hard: The almost impossible task was to develop a comprehensive proposal for a global indicator set in the short period of only 9 months. A large number of countries, regional and international agencies as well as civil society organisations – in fact, many of you in this room - contributed to this work during the various phases of open consultations. As a result, the Commission has before it a technical recommendation for the global indicator framework. This is the appropriate moment to pause and thank the IAEG for their remarkable accomplishment.

The Statistical Commission has now the important task to complete this work, approving the indicator framework and transmitting it to the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly. In doing so, you are adding the final missing critical piece of the 2030 Agenda.

Looking carefully at the technical recommendations, it is clearly understood that this is an initial indicator framework, based on the best that the statistical community could produce given the large scope of the Agenda and the current methodological and data availability constraints. Refinements and improvements will be needed over the years, as knowledge improves and new tools and data sources become available. It is also clear that the primary purpose of this global indicator framework will be to inform the annual progress report on the Sustainable Development Goals that will be prepared by the Secretary-General in cooperation with the United Nations system. At the national, regional and thematic levels additional and sometimes different indicators will be needed. We are looking for your advice and expertise to ensure that the overall indicator and information architecture remains connected and coherent, to allow meaningful over-time and across-space analysis.

Distinguished Delegates,

Completing the indicator framework is of course not the end of the story – on the contrary, it is the beginning: The SDG indicators will require an unprecedented amount of data to be produced and analysed – and it is evident that this will pose a significant challenge for national statistical systems, in developing as well as developed countries. The 2030 Agenda recognises that efforts to strengthen national statistical capacities will need to be substantially expanded, in particular in developing and least developed countries. This will have to be the central focus of your work in the years to come. I understand that under the auspices of the Statistical Commission, the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for post-2015 monitoring has taken up its work to promote national ownership and to

provide strategic guidance. I call upon all relevant stakeholders and partners to support the work of this High-level Group.

In particular, I welcome the efforts of this group to organise the United Nations World Data Forum, which will be an opportunity to bring together the broad development data communities in recognition of the fact that in this new era, the need for data and information will go beyond what national statistical systems are currently producing in each country. This is especially true, as the 2030 Agenda requires data to be disaggregated by income, gender, age, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics to make sure that – again – no one is left behind. The UN World Data Forum will be the welcome opportunity for the statistical community to explore new ways of gathering data, to reach out to new data-based partners and to new users.

Distinguished Delegates,

My opening remarks would not be complete without a word of congratulations on the successful celebration of World Statistics Day 2015 last October. I would like to thank the many of you who organized events around the globe. I encourage you to visit the exhibition here dedicated to its theme "Better data for Better Lives", which is testimony to the creativity and vibrancy of your global professional community.

You have an ambitious programme before you, which combines classical areas of work with highly relevant new themes. As you set out on your comprehensive programme, I wish to assure you of my Department's full support to the important work of this Commission. I thank my colleagues in the Statistics Division for their hard work throughout the year. We remain committed to serving you with professionalism and dedication.

I wish you all the best for this session and for your future work.

Thank you.

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