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Agenda item 5: programme questions (United Nations Statistics Division)

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Programme statement

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Madame Chairperson,

Distinguished Delegates and Colleagues,

Allow me to present to you a couple of indicators:

- Number of participants of the Statistical Commission at the opening session 2016 – including overflow room: 780 (not including webcast!).
- Number of countries represented during the 2016 session: 135.
- Number of international agencies: 50.
- Number of side events: 83.
- Number of official documents and background documents considered: 55.

Most of these numbers are unprecedented, and I dare say it is absolutely clear by these measures, that we had an exceptional Commission session: We are all here to show that the global statistical community is vibrant, strong and ready to engage.

To put such a Commission session together it takes many helping hands: Funding for a number of participants from developing countries came from the World Bank, the ECOWAS Secretariat and Paris21 and potentially other bi-lateral or multi-lateral donors who enabled individual participants to participate here. A cast of many prepared the 85 side events, including our feature events on Friday and Monday. Let me thank the hundreds who acted as chairs, moderators, presenters, discussants etc. And let me not forget all those who contributed to our exhibition on World Statistics Day, adding colour to the corridors of the United Nations building here and visualizing the hard work and at the same time creativity of our community around the world. Our substantive work this week is of course only the tip of the ice-berg of all the continuous work going on during the entire year in our increasingly extensive support network of working groups, task teams, city groups etc. Colleagues in these groups spent countless hours to prepare the substantive reports which form the basis for our debates. It is always delicate to single out individual countries or persons, but I hope you all agree, that if we had to award an Oscar for the best leading role in a statistical movie this year, it would have to go to Lisa from the Philippines and Enrique from Mexico for their leadership and tireless work on indicators. Thanks to them and to all leaders and members of

the Commission's many working groups. Finally, and last but not least I have to thank my great UNSD staff – this year buttoned in green – who do not only stand in the corridors this week to welcome and orient you. More importantly they are there working hard the whole year, orienting..... me!

Dear colleagues,

Let me now turn more specifically to the work programme of the UN Statistics Division. Our programme is of course governed by the budgetary decisions of the UN General Assembly and guided substantively by you – the UN Statistical Commission. We presented you last year our detailed list of over 500 outputs for the biennium 2016/17, and you have before you, for information, as a background document for this agenda item, our Strategic Programme Framework for the Biennium 2018/19, which will be presented to the General Assembly later this year. I invite the Commission to take note of this planning framework. Any comments you may have are welcome and will certainly assist us in the management of the Division.

At this point, I also need to inform you that the General Assembly, as part of general cost-cutting measures for the United Nations as a whole, reduced the allocation to the Division for 2016/17, resulting in the loss of one permanent post. However, we have also good news: As the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda explicitly recognises that its implementation will require “enhanced capacity-building support for developing countries, including the strengthening of national data systems and evaluation programmes” so to “ensure access to high quality, timely, reliable and disaggregated data”, the General Assembly approved 4 additional temporary positions for this year. Furthermore the approval of a Development Account project of 10 million dollars will allow us over the forthcoming four years to work closely with our Secretariat partners, especially the Regional Commissions to strengthen basic national statistical capacity and target specific data gaps. Also thanks to generous grants from the European Union and from the Australian government we will be able to expand our work in the specific areas of Environmental-Economic Accounting and disability statistics respectively. At this point I wish to also gratefully acknowledge the support by the Chinese Government, by UN-Women, by the EDGE donor countries (Australia, Canada, Germany, Republic of Korea and United States) and by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) for the funding of ongoing multi-year donor-funded projects in the areas of ‘strengthening basic statistics and geospatial information’, ‘Evidence and Data for Gender Equality (EDGE) and ‘Improving the collation, availability, and dissemination of data for monitoring indicators’ respectively. We are extraordinarily grateful to all donors for these extra-budgetary resources, which allow us to address critical needs, especially in developing countries.

In the category of ‘good news’, I would also like to share with you, that a recent audit by the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) confirmed the overall effective management of the division. We will work expeditiously to follow up on the specific recommendations and suggested opportunities for improvement, such as better user dialogue to streamline our data publications. Moreover, we expect that the ongoing Independent System-Wide Evaluation (ISWE) *of the contribution of the United Nations development system to strengthening national capacities for statistical analysis and data collection to support the achievement of the MDG and other internationally agreed development goals*” will yield specific recommendations how to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our service-delivery. This will be especially timely as we start designing our

strategies for assisting countries with the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

Dear colleagues,

This takes me to the substantive details of our programme ahead.

Yesterday, I received an invitation by the Academic Council of the UN System to participate in a panel discussion on “SDGs: Now comes the hard part...”. This could easily be the title of our programme ahead. Our absolute and primary focus will be on strengthening national statistical capacity and systems. In 2015 the Division organized 37 workshops, expert group meetings and seminars at which a total of 2,942 professionals exchanged experience and received training. And we want and will increase these numbers even further. The Division will of course continue to support the work of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators to complete the development indicator architecture. UNSD will then launch – under the guidance of the High Level Group - a comprehensive implementation programme. One specific part of the implementation programme is outreach to relevant partners and stakeholders. This will be done through the organisation of the first UN World Data Forum towards the end of 2016, to which we are very much looking forward. Internally, UNSD will initiate the development of an SDG indicator database and dissemination platform, and, as part of it, will review its existing cross-cutting outputs and their dissemination to optimize, align and integrate the production and dissemination processes, including those for the Statistical Yearbook and UNdata.

Dear colleagues,

We are, of course, committed to work with professional dedication on the many sectoral programmes, on which you have guided us just this week; and we attempt to do so in an increasingly integrated manner, emphasizing interlinkages. Let me highlight just a few of them, and of course I will have to be selective:

- Bringing the geospatial information and statistical community closer through the work of the joint Expert Group;
- Supporting the global working group on Big Data;
- Continuing our efforts to implement the 2012 SEEA and its related systems, as integrative frameworks in support of sustainable development;
- Intensifying our work on civil registration;
- Venturing further into highly policy relevant new areas such as climate change statistics and disability statistics, migration statistics.....
- Supporting the better coordination of global survey programmes and assisting countries in the formulation of national survey strategies.

Etc. etc. etc. – if this all sounds daunting, it is! But fortunately, we do not have to do it all alone, on the contrary – we have several layers of support and close cooperation:

First – the UN Regional Commissions, who are closest to us in terms of programmatic work. Then – the UN Specialised Agencies and Funds and Programmes, who have extensive subject matter expertise and ample experience in capacity building in their respective domains.

Moreover, I gratefully observe, that the various International and Supra-national organisations who work in the area of statistics, stand ready to lend their considerable support to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

And finally there is the private sector, academia and civil society who are eager to engage with us and bring modern and exciting data expertise to the table.

And last but certainly not least, in fact, First and Foremost, there is YOU, the national statistical systems, who are also an important resource for our global statistical work programme, through your in-kind contribution through numerous working and expert groups.

The sum-total of all of the above is the ‘global statistical system’, which brings us together, here, and which continues to be our joint and collective responsibility.

Yes, it is going to be quite a journey, so let’s fasten our seat-belts and get going. I am certainly looking forward to your ‘travel-companionship’.

Thank you very much.