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Opening Remarks

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UNDER SECRETARY GENERAL
UNITED NATIONS DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS AND SOCIALS AFFAIRS

48th SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS STATISTICAL COMMISSION

Delivered by
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Madame Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

I am honoured to welcome you to the 48th Session of the United Nations Statistical Commission.

It is very fitting that for your 70th anniversary session you are meeting – for the first time – here at the heart of the United Nations, in the General Assembly Hall.

The Commission has come a long way since its first session, held in early 1947 in a small room at the temporary headquarters of the then new United Nations in Lake Success, NY. Just 10 delegates and 9 observers attended that first Commission. I hope you have had a chance to look at the brochure and exhibition that we have put together for your celebration. In the photos from 70 years ago, you will see a small group of dedicated statisticians gathered around a few tables.

Look around this Hall today. I can only estimate - and I should probably ask for your professional help for this - that there are more than 700 delegates from all over the globe here.

For 70 years, the Commission has worked tirelessly to make data comparable around the world. The Commission approved the first international standard, the International Standard Industrial Classification of all Economic Activities (ISIC) in 1949. Many more standards and classifications followed over the decades.

Observing your work, I have come to appreciate very deeply how special this Commission is. Government experts come together as a global community, to develop

the common language of statistics and to serve the global community with your technical knowledge and expertise. This spirit of shared ethics and professionalism, found its clearest expression in the adoption of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics – first in 1994 by this body and then, later, by the General Assembly.

What a success story!

Distinguished Delegates,
Looking back at the past, we can draw valuable conclusions for the present and the future.

Over this past year, you have shown yet again that you can rise to new challenges. The General Assembly entrusted the Statistical Commission with the very difficult task of agreeing on a global indicator framework for measuring progress towards the SDGs. Over the past 18 months, you have worked tirelessly to respond to this call.

Through the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG indicators, you have put a technical proposal before this Commission for adoption. It is evident, that the development of a robust and high-quality indicator framework is a technical process that will need to continue over time. I understand that the proposals before you, do not only include the indicator framework, but also a concrete research agenda, focusing on so-called Tier 3 indicators – and a proposed time table allowing for future adjustments of the indicator framework. Because you know better than anybody does, that knowledge will improve and new tools and data sources will become available. It is also very important to stress, that the primary purpose of this global indicator framework is to inform the Secretary General's annual progress report on the SDGs at the global level. Additional, and sometimes different, indicators will be needed at the national, regional and thematic levels.

I encourage you to be bold, to approve the global indicator framework, and to transmit it to ECOSOC and the General Assembly, thus complying with the concrete mandate given to you. In doing so, you will add the final missing critical piece to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Defining the indicator framework is just the beginning of your work in support of the SDGs. The 2030 Agenda requires data for many areas to be disaggregated by income, gender, age, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics, to make sure that no one is left behind. This will pose significant challenges in many countries – developed and developing. In the 2030 Agenda, Member States agreed to intensify efforts to strengthen statistical capacities in developing countries; and UN agencies and all international organizations need to work together closely to provide assistance to countries to significantly strengthen national statistical capacities.

The Statistical Commission's High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (HLG), is providing overall strategic leadership for statistical development in support of

the SDGs. I congratulate you for organizing the very successful First UN World Data Forum in Cape Town, South Africa, just a few weeks ago, and for the groundbreaking and innovative move to open the door for a dialogue with non-official data communities. The more than 1,400 participants from over 100 countries and the 300 speakers in over 80 programme sessions demonstrate that – under your leadership - a new global data community is emerging, consisting of national statistical offices, international organizations, and civil society groups, private sector and academia, as well as political leaders and sustainable development data users. This new global data community stands ready to collaborate and launch new initiatives and innovative solutions that will deliver better data on all aspects of sustainable development.

The Forum concluded with the launch of the ambitious Cape Town Global Action Plan. I am confident that this Statistical Commission will continue to write its history by providing leadership in implementing the Cape Town Global Action Plan. I know that many are already looking forward to the second UN World Data Forum, which will be held in Dubai in October 2018.

Distinguished Delegates,

Over the past 70 years the Statistics Division of my Department has not only dutifully, but enthusiastically supported your work. I assure you of my Department's continued full support. I thank my colleagues in the Statistics Division for their hard work. We remain committed to serving you with utmost professionalism and dedication.

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

Thank you.

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