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**Opening Remarks**
**49th Session of the United Nations Statistical Commission**

**New York, 6 March 2018**

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

It is my honor and pleasure to welcome you to the 49th Session of the Statistical Commission. Although this is my first time speaking here, I feel that I know you already because I have heard extensively about the work you do, and I have been looking forward to meeting this "famous" Statistical Community.

Throughout my professional career, I have been very fortunate to observe how decisions are made from a front-row seat. One important lesson I have learned through these experiences, is that what separates good decisions from the bad ones is the fact that the good ones are informed by right data and evidence. Therefore, as I speak to you for the first time, I want you to know that I truly believe in the power of data and statistics. I greatly value the work you do in advancing statistics globally, in particular, in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Distinguished delegates,

We have made enormous progress. Thanks to your work, the SDG indicator framework was adopted by the General Assembly last June, and it provides us with a blueprint to systematically assess progress we are making in achieving the 2030 Agenda.

On this occasion, I'd also like to ask your help in promoting the awareness of the SDG indicator framework adopted by the UN General Assembly, as I learned from the recent Davos Conference that the business community, even those from the developed countries, are not very familiar with the SDG indicator framework adopted by the UN.

However, this has also been a challenging experience. The 2030 Agenda has an expansive scope and coverage. Monitoring the implementation of the Agenda not only requires collecting data on new topics, but also ensuring the availability of timely disaggregated data that leaves no one behind. This new unprecedented demand for data has been quite a challenge for national statistical systems, as they have the primary responsibility of collecting data. This is

particularly true in today's fiscal environment when the resources available to strengthen and modernize the capacities of national statistical systems have not been commensurate with the added responsibilities of the implementation of the new agenda.

Distinguished Delegates,

I remain hopeful that these challenges can be addressed. After all, statisticians are very innovative professionals. Let's just look at this Commission itself. Starting in the 1940s, the Commission has been developing systems, principles, rules and standards for measuring all aspects of human life: from GDP, to migration, to trade, to gender and the environment for concepts and standards that we now take for granted, all were decided right here at this very Commission.

Therefore, I am very confident, that you will continue to apply your innovative streak to the SDGs too.

Addressing the data challenges in the context of the SDGs require us to think outside the box. It requires leveraging modern technologies to find newer, faster, and more creative ways of doing things. This means new data sources, new platforms, new business processes, which are solidly built on what already exists. It means being nimble, agile, and being able to do more with less. To put it simply, it means innovation.

In fact, a lot is already happening. If you attended the Friday seminar this past week and the Monday seminar yesterday, you couldn't help but be impressed at the amount of work that the National Statistical Offices are already doing in this area.

The Statistics Division of my Department has also taken a leadership role in advancing innovative work streams. It is providing technical assistance to countries on establishing national data platforms and developing users' engagement strategy. It is facilitating the integration of data and statistics with geospatial information. Countries are working with the Statistics Division to develop their national data hubs for SDGs and data exchange at the global level.  The Statistics Division is taking a leadership role in establishing a new Global Network of Institutions for Statistical Training to offer efficient, effective and coordinated statistical training. An e-learning platform is being launched that contains various tools on SDG indicators production and utilization. Our publications are becoming more interactive; using cutting-edge tools from private sector partners, they enable users to make sense of data much more easily. Through the UN World Data Forum, the Statistics Division helps bring together technology and data leaders and practitioners to identify solutions and innovative tools to respond to the growing demand for data. I am very proud of these forward-looking initiatives.

As we implement new reforms in DESA, with the aim of orienting the UN towards SDG implementation and strengthening support for Member States, the Statistics Division's engagement in innovation will be reinforced further. I have been very impressed by the professionalism and the technical expertise of the staff in this division.

In the next few days, as you delve deeper into the Statistics Division's work, I would like to remind you of one concrete way how your work here is making a difference. Later in July, the High-level Political Forum will assess the progress towards SDG Goals 6, 7, 11, 12, and 15. The outcome of this review will shape real policies and government action all over the world. None of this would have been possible without your tireless collective effort to make statistical systems fit-for-purpose for the 2030 Agenda. For that I commend you!

Distinguished delegates,

I wish you all the best for your discussions and I look forward to seeing the outcomes of the meeting. I also want to assure you of my Department's full support of your work through a strengthened Statistics Division.

Thank you.

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