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Opening Remarks

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Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour to welcome you to the 51st Session of the Statistical Commission.

This annual gathering brings together the entire global statistical community, under the leadership of the United Nations. Your objective is to work jointly in developing and advancing statistical standards, and guiding statistical activities. In doing so, the decisions of governments, including for the economy and the public, can be based on high-quality and trusted data and statistics. In this regard, this Commission can look back on a proud history of success.

Still, there are always new challenges that will arise. As a subsidiary body to the UN Economic and Social Council, you support the High-Level Political Forum to review progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Your most important and visible contribution is to oversee the preparation of the annual global SDG progress report. In this context, timely, quality, disaggregated and open data are critical, both at the national and global level. Official statistics are essential to the efforts of countries and the international community in achieving sustainable development. Therefore, many of you bring the expertise of the national statistical systems for the preparation of the Voluntary National Reviews, which are presented every year at the HLPF.

I am very pleased that this Commission will have before it the results of the 2020 round of review of the global SDG indicators framework. I congratulate the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) for its extensive work and for reaching agreement on a very large number of proposals. The update of the indicator framework will give support and a further boost to the SDG monitoring efforts, including by helping ensure that no one is left behind.

Distinguished delegates,

I am greatly impressed by the range of topics to be discussed at this session. In particular, they reflect the spirit of innovation expressed in the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data.

Allow me to highlight a few selected programme elements aside from the SDG indicators: On the economic pillar, you will be discussing the future of economic statistics, including issues of globalization, digitalization and well-being and sustainability. You will review the status of the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme. And you will also have before you the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda as a holistic approach to civil registration, vital statistics and identity management.

I also commend your countless efforts to strengthen the capacities of statistical systems. For instance, this Commission will discuss issues of coordination: It is suggested, that the central statistical office must play a leading role for the entire statistical system – both at the national and global levels. The new handbook on statistical organization and management will help with their necessary modernization. Major progress has also been made in the area of open data, and in the implementation of the Fundamental Principles for Official Statistics, including when using new data sources.

A UN Global Platform has been developed, and regional hubs will facilitate the use of Big Data and data science for official statistics and SDG indicators.

I also express my appreciation for this Commission's efforts to integrate statistical and geospatial information, and for the progress that is being made! I am proud to announce that substantive efforts are being made to facilitate research and capacity development for such an integration.

And only yesterday, the High-Level Forum on Official Statistics discussed the role of data stewards in the context of the new emerging data ecosystem. The Commission must be commended for its leadership in actively developing a vision for the future of official statistics. Data stewardship initiatives are bringing different players and data types together. Indeed, we are working to create a UN data ecosystem that aims to maximize the value of the UN System's data assets, both for the organization and the people it serves. We will certainly keep you, as the experts in comprehensive and responsible data management, well informed.

Distinguished delegates,

In October 2020, the third UN World Data Forum will be held in Bern, Switzerland. I understand that the event is creating great enthusiasm. Many proposals have been submitted and the preparations are fully underway. This event will be a further stepping-stone in overcoming data gaps for SDG monitoring. It will advance better use of resources for data and statistics, and ensure political and financial support for data development.

In conclusion, the Sustainable Development Goals have created tremendous enthusiasm around the globe. With just 10 years to go, the UN Secretary General has called for a Decade of Action to deliver the Goals by 2030. As we look towards commemorating the 75th anniversary

of the United Nations this year, the world needs collective and multilateral action more than ever before.

I urge the statistical community to join these efforts and accelerate actions for more and better data and statistics. We must be able to measure all aspects of sustainable development. Strengthening the statistical capacity of countries needs to be central in these efforts. The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs is fully committed to support you in your important work.

I wish you fruitful deliberations and a successful Commission session.

I thank you for your attention.
