

Statement made by Mr. Pali Lehohla, Statistician-General, Statistics South Africa
on agenda item 3(j) “Statistics of human development”

I have never felt the urge and the urgency for the implementation of the United Fundamental Principles for Official Statistics as I feel it today. These principles have served us well in the past and indeed they will serve us even better today and in the future, and their institutionalised implementation will even serve us better. I am convinced that the UNDP report and the controversy it has raised presents us with a distinct concrete opportunity for moving ahead with speed on an institutionalised process of the implementation of the fundamental principles.

The UNDP may be independent and yes we accept such as their status, but such a status of independence must correspond and be governed by principle 2 of the UN fundamental principles of official statistics and unfortunately this is where their tenet for independence is weakest. Given this fatal failure the UNDP report then fails the test of principle 9 and 10. In this regard we are justified to read the riot act as enshrined in principle 4 which relates to comments against wrong use of statistics and or their interpretation.

The fact that the UNDP raised in the past its position of independence, brings centre stage the question of the responsibility of the UNSC as well as the role of UNSD in the UN family in relation to the coordination of statistics, including its status in the hierarchy. Needless to mention that when we petitioned the Secretary General on GIVAS which is now succeeded by Global Pulse, similar issues of the responsibility of the UNSC, and the role and hierarchical form of the UNSD in the UN family architecture becomes critical and requires addressing. We need to address this matter comprehensively.

The release of the UNDP report shortly after the Secretary General released the MDG report created conditions for excitement, particularly in relation to the contradictory figures that emerged subsequently. This made for public dismay at the UN circus and a comedy of errors in the UN family of numbers. In country, some heads of statistics were summoned to explain this circus.

This august body established in 1947 has served us well in enhancing world peace. It cannot be reduced to a spectre of ridicule and be regarded as a circus play field. It has to be protected. The blood rush to the head by the UNDP to release the report and particularly shortly after the MDG report despite the cautions given by the UNSC on data quality matters and consultations leaves several questions unanswered and these questions will remain unanswered if we fall short on our historic mission of implementing the fundamental principles of official statistics. Mr Chair, I have never felt the urge and the urgency for the implementation of the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics as I feel it at this very moment. Thank you Mr Chairman.