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Remarks

Opening Plenary of the United Nations World Data Forum

Cape Town, South Africa, 16 January 2017

**Distinguished Guests,
Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is my pleasure to join you for the First United Nations World Data Forum here in Cape Town. I thank the Government of South Africa and

Statistics South Africa for co-hosting the event. I also thank the many representatives of national statistical systems who spearheaded this important event, and the Programme Committee members for their work and dedication in putting together such an impressive programme.

Distinguished guests,

I sincerely appreciate the numerous partners, international agencies and other donors who have supported the participation of many speakers and contributors to this gathering, and in particular the Government of China and Commissioner Ning for their generous support to the event.

The Secretary-General’s Independent Expert Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development first proposed the idea for a United Nations World Data Forum.

In their 2014 report “*A World that Counts*”, the group recommended to hold a “World Forum on Sustainable Development Data” every two years, to

bring together the whole data ecosystem to share ideas and experiences for data improvements, innovation, advocacy and technology transfer.

The Secretary-General mandated the UN Statistical Commission to develop a road map to fully realize the aspirations of the data revolution's advisory group. Under the leadership of the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Forum was established as the space to create mechanisms to intensify cooperation for data and statistics across various communities, including information technology, geospatial information managers, data scientists, private sector, civil society, and data users.

This Forum is a unique opportunity for technical and political discussions on the opportunities and challenges in producing and using information, data, and statistics to facilitate global sustainable development and to ensure progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

This Forum takes place at a crucial time for strengthening data and statistical capacity around the world. We have begun the second year of implementing the 2030 Agenda, an agenda that will guide international development efforts and national policy making through 2030.

Accurate, reliable, timely and disaggregated data is essential to achieving the 2030 Agenda's 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Success requires that all communities represented in this room fulfill a critical role and find ways to work together and create partnerships and synergies.

The new agenda poses enormous challenges for the global statistical community. It is imperative to modernize, improve capacity and cooperate at a truly global level. In particular, National Statistical Offices (NSOs) have a key role to play.

They constitute the core of national information systems. They are the institutions responsible for ensuring the production of reliable and high-quality statistics, in line with international standards to ensure data quality

and comparability across countries, in full alignment with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics.

It is also essential to strengthen national statistical capacities in countries where financial and human resources for statistics are lacking. All national statistical offices should become the new data hubs to gather and provide the necessary data to inform policies, and monitor progress. To make this happen, we will need governments, international organizations, businesses, academia and civil society to join forces and work together.

We expect this Forum to offer the space for partnerships to be created or strengthened. We look forward to new commitments on strengthening statistical systems and on building a growing consensus on data principles and other policy issues like open data and data privacy.

The Forum will also serve as a launching pad where diverse data producers and users can get behind the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data. This Plan calls for the full, active and focused commitment of government, policy leaders and the international community to undertake key actions under six strategic areas:

- 1. coordination and strategic leadership;**
- 2. innovation and modernization of national statistical systems;**
- 3. strengthening of statistical systems;**
- 4. dissemination of data on sustainable development;**
- 5. building of partnerships; and**
- 6. mobilization of resources.**

This is a very exciting time to be involved in work on data and statistics. The data landscape is rapidly changing. I am delighted to be able to launch this first important event for collective action to harness the data revolution for sustainable development. I look forward to the many discussions, partnerships and new initiatives to be presented over the next three days.

Thank you.
