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REMARKS

Opening Plenary of the United Nations World Data Forum

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It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the 2018 United Nations World Data Forum in Dubai. I want to thank the Government of the United Arab Emirates and the Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Authority of the United Arab Emirates for hosting the event. I also wish to thank the many representatives of national statistical systems, whom through the Statistical Commission, and its High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development spearheaded this important event, and the Programme Committee members for their work and dedication in putting together such an impressive programme.

Allow me also to express my sincere appreciation to 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 for its generous support to the event and the Government of Japan.

I am excited to see the great interest in this event, with almost 2,000 people attending, representing governments, national statistics offices, international and regional organizations, civil society, academia and the private sector. This is a testimony to the increasing level of collaboration across different data ecosystems, the unprecedented number of new initiatives and approaches for the improvement of data production and utilization, and the impact of the first Forum in Cape Town in raising the importance of data and statistics for the full implementation of the 2030 agenda.

The Forum arises at a crucial time for strengthening data and statistical capacity around the world. We are nearing the end of the third year of the 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, integrating all three dimensions of sustainability – the economic, social, and environmental – that will guide international development efforts and national policy making up through 2030. To do so, it is essential to have relevant, timely, open and disaggregated data, which requires that all communities represented in this room fulfill a critical role and find ways to work across different domains and create partnerships and synergies.

The new agenda poses enormous challenges for the global data and statistical system, and I am excited to see the ways in which the various data communities are modernizing, increasing capacity and cooperating at a truly global level. In particular, National Statistical Offices are playing a key role, since they constitute the core of national information systems and 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, and in full alignment with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. National Statistical Offices are also establishing important partnerships with civil society and the private sector, without which it would not be possible to meet the new data demands.

Ladies and gentlemen, the priorities for addressing these challenges are clearly outlined in the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data, launched at the first Forum and emphasizing innovation and modernization of national statistical systems as imperative to achieving the 2030 Agenda. These include: Facilitating the application of new technologies and new data sources into mainstream statistical activities; Removing barriers to the use of new data sources; and Developing guidelines on the use of new and innovative data generated outside the official statistical system into official statistics.

We must work together as a global community to integrate information systems, consisting of statistics, geospatial information and data from a variety of sources, and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs at the UN is leading this global effort. In collaboration with partners from governments, civil society, academia and the private sector, we at the UN are pioneering new ways to address the challenges and opportunities of data interoperability, including by identifying tools and defining the governance system for data sets from different data ecosystems to work with one another across institutional, sectoral and organizational boundaries. While this work was launched at the first Forum, it is imperative that this work continue so that we have access to all of the data being produced and users are able to easily combine data from diverse data sources in order to monitor progress on the 2030 Agenda.

Finally, we must also ensure that data are open. Significant progress has been made in this area. At the UN, we are leading this work at the global level, through the working groups at the UN Statistical Commission on the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and Open Data. This work focuses on developing tools, governance systems and principles that deal with issues of open data, data, privacy, etc. including the use of private sector data. Principles of open data, with people at the center, are key to ensure that we have the necessary data to fulfill the most important ambition of the 2030 agenda of leaving no one behind.

To achieve the ambitions set on in the plan, both increased domestic resources and international support will be needed. My expectation is that the outcome of the discussions at this forum on ways to promote “more and better funding” for data and statistics will help up shape the way forward. The immediate next steps will be translating those ideas into action and ensure that we maximize the effectiveness of funding for sustainable development data as this is crucial for the successful implementation of the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data and for fulfilling the data needs of the 2030 agenda.

I look forward to hearing about innovative ways to both increase the amount and effectiveness of funding for data and statistics and I am excited that a Dubai Declaration on financing for data and statistics will be launched at the Forum.

The United Nations World Data Forum is still in its early stages – this is only the second Forum and the Forum will take place on a biennial basis. We are at a critical juncture – 3 years into the 2030 Agenda – and we will need to act now to ensure that the necessary data are available and used to implement and effectively monitor the 2030 Agenda.

Thank you.
