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Press Remarks

Briefing on the opening of the UN World Data Forum

15 January 2017, 2:30pm

Cape Town International Convention Centre, Media Room

Thank you, moderator,

Minister Radebe,

Mr. Lehohla,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

[OPENING]

It is my great pleasure to join you at this press briefing. I want to thank the Government of South Africa and Statistics South Africa for co-hosting this first United Nations World Data Forum.

[2030 AGENDA]

The Forum comes at a crucial time. Countries all around the world are mobilizing to implement the transformative 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

To do so, it is essential to have accurate, reliable, timely and disaggregated data. We need to track the unprecedented range of economic, social and environmental goals that are integrated under sustainable development. This will require everyone in the statistics and data community – from governments, the private sector, the scientific and academic communities and civil society -- to work together and create partnerships and synergies.

The 2030 Agenda also poses enormous challenges for the global statistical community, to modernize and improve our capacity, so that national statistical offices can provide the necessary data to inform policies, and monitor progress.

We have made tremendous progress on statistics and data in the last decade, under the Millennium Development Goals, but now we need to take it to a whole new level.

[EXPECTED OUTCOME]

What results can we expect from the Forum?

First, the Forum will serve as a launching pad for a new Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data. This Plan calls for a commitment by governments, policy leaders and the international community to undertake key actions in strategic areas, including:

- **innovation and modernization of national statistical systems;**
- **dissemination of data on sustainable development;**
- **building partnerships; and**
- **mobilizing resources.**

The Action Plan has been under development for the past year by statistical experts in a high-level group, and will be formally approved by the UN Statistical Commission when they meet in March. This Forum is the perfect place to launch the Action Plan and get all the major players behind it.

Second, I expect new partnerships to be launched or strengthened, and concrete commitments to be announced that will improve statistical systems.

Third, I expect that the Forum will help build consensus on data principles and other policy issues like open data and data privacy.

And I expect that a number of concrete solutions will be launched on innovative ways to use the new sources of data that are growing exponentially in our digital world. These can be used to produce high-quality, timely information for measuring sustainable development. Some of the projects being pursued include:

- **How high-resolution satellite images can be used to map poverty and measure soil fertility and crop yields.**
- **How open data and new technologies like remote sensing can improve the productivity of African agriculture.**

But to be truly effective and to scale, these innovative projects need to be integrated with the national statistical systems that are the bedrock of global statistical cooperation – and that is where the Forum will play a crucial role.

The UN World Data Forum is not a one-time event. It is the beginning of new and continuous collaboration. It will take place every two years under the

guidance of the UN Statistical Commission. And work will continue to take full advantage of the new initiatives and partnerships to harness innovation and technology.

[CLOSING]

This is a very exciting time to be involved in work on data and statistics. The data landscape is rapidly changing.

I have high hopes that this first UN World Data Forum will advance collective action to harness the data revolution for sustainable development, and help deliver better data for all. Thank you.
