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**ADDRESS TO THE 2006 AFRICA SYMPOSIUM ON STATISTICAL
DEVELOPMENT “THE 2010 ROUND OF POPULATION AND HOUSING
CENSUSES”**

TREVOR A MANUEL, MINISTER OF FINANCE
Cape Town, 30 JANUARY 2006

Chairperson;

Ambassador Abdellai Jenna, Executive Secretary of the United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa;

Heads of Statistical Agencies;

Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Distinguished delegates

Dear friends

Let me welcome you to both South Africa and to Cape Town, this city of such remarkable contradictions. I trust that your stay here will be memorable, if only for the quality of agreements that you will strike on the *2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses*.

This conference has its genesis in September 2000 when 147 heads of State and Governments, at the United Nations Millennium Summit, committed

themselves to making the right to development a reality for everyone and to free the entire human race from want.

They acknowledged that progress should be based on sustainable economic growth, which must focus on the poor, with human rights at its core. The Millennium Declaration is remembered most for its articulation of the measurable objectives as the Millennium Development Goals.

The adoption of that Declaration, with its strong emphasis on human and economic development across Africa, represents an enormous victory in the struggle to overturn the ravages and the excesses of centuries of colonialism on the African continent.

To help track progress, the United Nations Secretariat and the specialized agencies of the UN system, as well as representatives of IMF, the World Bank and OECD defined a set of time-bound and measurable goals and targets for combating poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination against women.

International experts also selected relevant indicators to be used to assess progress over the period from 1990 to 2015, the targets date for meeting these expectations.

In September 2005, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, presented the findings of the first review of progress being made towards achieving the time-bound Millennium Development Goals.

The findings for Africa were appalling! Not only did the data paint the picture of the extent of underdevelopment, it also recorded the fact that even if all of the MDG's were attained by 2015, African development would still lag way behind

every other continent. Moreover, profound concern was expressed about the quality of the data available.

Two immediate challenges present themselves. Firstly, how can we continue to lobby for the centrality of African development initiatives if the data we present has little credibility? Secondly, how can we ask governments and donors to direct resources towards areas of need if we cannot empirically establish where the needs exist?

I am reminded also of another victory secured in the Bretton Woods Institutions in the struggle against the “once-size-fits-all” structural adjustment programmes. This victory is represented by the shift to the methodology of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers which are adopted by governments in developing countries after participatory processes in their countries. Whilst these PRSP’s describe the macroeconomic, structural and social policies and programmes that the country will pursue, the undergirding of the PRSP’s is entirely statistical. Undoubtedly, if the undergirding is unsound, the programmes built on such foundations will be severely compromised.

There is common cause that national statistical systems in Africa still present profound weaknesses, including poor political support; inadequate legal and institutional framework for statistical activities; a lack of coordination and weak management. One of the real difficulties that confront statistical agencies is their relationship with political principals. In politics, we don’t always wish to hear unpleasant truths. It is far easier to convince ourselves, our donors and the entire world that the situation is a vast improvement on reality. However good that may make us feel, the paradox is that it might generate a disinclination on the part of

donors to resource our needs, if we have made the case that such resources are no longer required. What then will be the role for our statisticians?

There is an obvious need to reverse the decline of African statistics. The concern is based on the fact that for instance, 19 out of 56 countries and areas in Africa have not conducted a population census in the last 10 years, nearly twice as many in the previous decade. Consequently, factual country-level data in a majority of the cases replaced by estimates produced by international organizations often on the basis of inferring information from other countries or from surveys that are completely out of date.

As a result, for many African countries, national trends to inform and monitor the implementation of development policies cannot be produced.

The history of census taking in Africa has been characterised by irregularity, incompleteness, inaccuracies and subsequently a gross under-utilization of census data. Consequently, census results have not adequately informed policy formulation and programme implementation, and socio-economic development in general, more so because government policy makers and planners were ill-equipped to utilize the results.

Yet the centrality of population and housing censuses in knowledge management in Africa, in the pursuit of evidence-based decision-making, and in monitoring progress made towards achieving national development goals cannot be overstated.

A number of experts have begun to focus attention on the serious quality deficiencies in the data on which the conclusions of the United Nations MDG

report are based... Part of the problem is the inadequate data and for some MDG indicators, no data exist.

In addition, the process of the preparation of the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses, all regions, with exception of Africa, have organized working groups, tasks forces and other meetings, with the collaboration of their member states, to assess their census experiences for the 2000 round as well as to have a regional position on the proposed recommendations with respect to the United Nations *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*.

During the 22-26 August meeting in New York, the Expert Group Meeting on the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses was concerned by the lack of progress and preparation at the African region level and resolved that a meeting for census experts being organized in time for preparing the report in time for submission to the UN Statistics Commission in March 2006.

The main aim of this symposium is thus to facilitate the strengthening of the role of African countries in the world programme on 2010 population and housing censuses, to strengthen collaboration on census related activities, to develop strategies for African countries to fill the glaring data gaps that limit Africa's ability to monitor progress made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

How do we achieve these objectives?

- Encouraging all African countries to undertake a population and housing census in the 2010 round;
- Focusing and fostering linkages in the MDG related and census campaigns;

- Making a concerted effort to create the necessary capacity to achieve these objectives AND
- Improving reporting mechanisms between National Statistical Agencies and International Agencies.

I am exceedingly grateful that all of you have responded so promptly and at short notice to attend this symposium in order to give impetus to the 2010 initiative. I am particularly appreciative of the attendance and enthusiasm of the Executive Secretary and his team at the Economic Commission for Africa.

The *2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses* needs a Pan African Champion and I can think of no institution or initiative better placed than the ECA to lead and inspire.

In closing I want to quote my President, His Excellence, Thabo Mbeki, in his opening address at the launch of the African Union, Durban, 9 July 2002:

He said, "By forming the Union, the peoples of our continent have made the unequivocal statement that Africa must unite! We as Africans have a common and a shared destiny! Together, we must redefine this destiny for a better life for all the people of this continent...developing new forms of partnerships at all levels and segments of our societies, between segments of our societies and our governments and between our governments."

And this is the challenge for the statisticians, because if we can't measure it, we cannot manage it.

Thank you very much.