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UNFPA Statement at the 5th Session of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics

(14-16 December 2016)

On behalf of UNFPA, I would like to convey our appreciation to ESCAP for the organization of this meeting and for this opportunity to share our views with the Committee.

With the adoption of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, there is renewed recognition of the importance of statistics in the pursuit of this holistic and ambitious endeavor to ensure a life of dignity for all people. And in order to achieve the SDGs we will need to know more about the most essential, and at the same time, continually changing characteristics of people and communities. We must know at a minimum how many people are living and how their numbers will change; how old they are and how age structures will change; and where they are living and how their spatial distribution will change. Without this basic knowledge we will not understand the needs of people and how they evolve. It will be a question of luck rather than design whether we will be able to meet those needs and hence the right of all people to a life of dignity.

We must count people to make people count. It is with this in mind that we have worked over several decades as a close partner of national statistical offices as well as sectoral ministries and civil society organizations to build and strengthen the capacities of Member States in the generation, analysis and use of statistics. The systematic use of population data and projections -- which continues to depend on censuses and surveys, even as we are building up vital registration systems -- is of critical importance for people-centered and evidence based policy making.

The importance of population data is further underscored by the important emphasis of the SDGs on reducing inequalities and eliminating exclusions, leaving no one behind and putting the farthest behind first. This in turn means an imperative for disaggregation of data by income, gender, age, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other reasons for which people are favored or discriminated against. For UNFPA, the importance of statistics lies in their power to tell us where the gaps are and whether and how we are advancing in our mission to help build a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, every young person's potential is realized and where everyone counts.

This is a big challenge for all countries, particularly for the poorer nations with less developed capacities and those that face conflict and natural disasters and their consequences including massive and rapid migration. It is also a challenge to the existing ways that statistics are collected, including censuses, that are not able to respond quickly to the need for up to date data.

UNFPA stands ready to support the efforts of both governments and civil societies to strengthen their capacities to generate, understand, analyze and use statistics toward achieving the SDGs. This will require truly transforming national statistical systems. While