

## Special African Statistics Day 2006

**Statement by Mr. Abdoulie Janneh**  
**UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ECA**

Luanda, Angola  
7 December 2006

Your Excellency Dr. Roberto De Almeida, Speaker of the National Parliament of the Republic of Angola,

Your Excellency, Dr. Ana Dias Lourenço, Minister of Planning of the Republic of

Angola,

Excellencies,

Dr. Maxwell Mkwezalamba, Commissioner of Economic Affairs of the African Union Commission (AUC),

Representatives from sub regional, regional, and international organizations,

Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bom dia.

I am honoured to welcome you to the celebration of this 2006 Special African Statistics Day here in Luanda, Angola. This event is jointly organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) in collaboration with the African Union Commission (AUC), and thus underscores the abiding commitment of these institutions to the development of statistics in Africa.

It is gratifying to see that Africa's partners in statistics development are here with us, to join us and the government of Angola for this celebration – the major event of this year's African Statistics week that began last Saturday, and ends tomorrow. I thank them for their presence.

I would like to thank the government and people of Angola for their kindness in hosting this event and for the excellent facilities that they have made available to us. I would also like to thank them for the hospitality that they have extended to me personally and to members of my delegation since our arrival. Minister Ana Dias Lourenço, and the Instituto Nacional de Estatística (INE) of Angola were our main counterparts during negotiations to hold this event here in Angola. Permit me therefore to thank her and the INE for their superb efforts in making this celebration here a reality.

African Statistics Day is a yearly advocacy tool aimed at raising awareness of the importance of Statistics in the economic and social development of Africa. This Day, normally celebrated on the 18 th of November each year, was this year postponed by a few weeks, in order to hold it here in Luanda.

Our reason for this is clear. Although the celebration of the African Statistics Day is a national event, we decided long ago to make it a pan-African event in order to emphasize the commonality of the challenges that our countries face in this area and to promote a healthy exchange of view on how to move the agenda. Last year, we celebrated the Day in East Africa. Much like what we see here, representatives from all across Africa gathered in Kampala, Uganda, under the banner of the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses, which ends in 2014 to discuss the burning issues framing the development and use of statistics in Africa. This round of census is of extreme importance to all of us as it will provide the data for assessing the progress that our region has made in achieving the targets of the Millennium Development Goals and the priorities of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

In our midst here in Luanda are many National Statistical Offices (NSOs) from Africa. Among us also are users and the unobserved generators of statistics, underscoring the point frequently made that all of us – statisticians and non-statisticians, providers and users of statistics – are in the business of statistics.

I would also like to recognize the presence of representatives of United Nations agencies, regional, and international organizations, as well as partner governments. All of us are gathered here for one purpose - to support the development of statistics in Africa in general and in Angola in particular. The presence of all of us here in Luanda signifies the high importance we each attach to the development of statistics for sound policy-making, as well as our belief that the best way to advance our agenda for statistics development in our region – and in this sub-region – is through collaboration among all stakeholders.

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It must sometimes seem that we belabour the issue of statistics in Africa. To a considerable extent that is probably true. However, we do so because we have not made as much progress as we would like in addressing the problems of statistics and statistical development in Africa. In many countries in our region, basic data and statistics are either unavailable, available but not in a timely manner or available but unreliable, for decision-making. Surveys are often conducted episodically for reasons ranging from poor capacity to lack of financial resources to lack of political will.

Where data exist, they often exist in forms that are not easily accessible to decision-makers and researchers. In these circumstances, it is difficult, not impossible to plan. But planning under difficult circumstances often results in suboptimal outcomes. Hence in order to improve planning outcomes in our countries, it is important that we continue to focus on enhancing and developing statistics in Africa.

Fortunately, there is encouraging news. The MDGs as well as the need to monitor progress towards the priorities of NEPAD (and also for the African Peer Review Mechanism – APRM) are providing needed impetus for the development of statistics in our region. There has been a general improvement in the availability of statistics in Africa in recent times. There is also some evidence of a strong resolve by governments and policy makers to address this issue. African governments, assisted by their development partners, are following through on the commitment made two years ago when they adopted the Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics (MAPS), in Marrakech, Morocco, to develop and implement National Strategies for the Development of Statistics – NSDSs. Learning from and building upon the experience of past plans, the NSDSs serve to establish a coherent framework for statistical development at the country level.

While we applaud the adoption of MAPS, it is not encouraging to observe that with less than a few weeks to go before the deadline set for adopting NSDSs, only three countries have done so. Although another twenty-eight countries are currently designing their NSDSs and seventeen others have just a statistical master plan, it would be legitimate here to call for actions to ensure that the commitment to MAPS is not just words but an actuality. And special efforts need to be targeted at the five countries that have no plan at all.

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Let me use this opportunity to touch very briefly on an issue that is perhaps uppermost on the minds of many of us here – the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses. As most of you are aware, few African countries undertook a census during the 2000 round which was from 1995 to 2004. This seriously handicapped planning and monitoring of development outcomes across our region. There is thus an urgent need for an increase in the number of our countries conducting their decennial census this time around. The argument for this is clear and unimpeachable: Censuses will continue to be the main source of socio-demographic data, not just in our part of the globe but across the globe. The census is essential in the design and management of programmes for achieving the targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at the national, sub-national and small area levels as well as for monitoring progress towards those targets. For example, poverty mapping using census data can be very useful for directing resources and programmes to poor areas and people.

There are efforts to improving the participation of African countries in the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses. This has been a key concern of the Advisory Board on Statistics in Africa (ABSA) which has among other things recommended that priority support should be given to countries that have never conducted a census or those that could not undertake a census in the 2000 Round. ABSA has also called for increased priority for technical or financial support to countries experiencing difficult conditions, such as post-conflict countries, and countries that have not completed the entire census process, particularly data analysis and dissemination.

Progress in this area depends critically on continuing dialogue amongst African countries.

But the census is not the only challenge that we face in respect of statistics development. Capacity continues to be a constraint in most countries. The horizon in this regard does not look especially bright as enrolment in statistics programs in many African universities remains very low. There is therefore need to scale up efforts to encourage young and brilliant African minds to see statistics as a rewarding profession. There is also an urgent need to improve the capacity of national statistics systems. Qualified and competent professionals have to be attracted to run and manage the systems. There is also a need to institute a regulatory regime that makes it mandatory for firms and individuals to collect key data that are necessary for planning. Finally, governments and development partners need to scale up resources available for the development of statistics. Without adequate financial support, it is unlikely that our dreams of timely and reliable statistics will not be realized.

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

At ECA, we believe that statistical development is critical for the advancement of our continent and is critical for our efforts in

key areas such as regional integration and the implementation of the NEPAD programme. I have already underscored its importance for our efforts to design, implement, and monitor progress towards the targets of the MDGs at the national and regional levels. It is for this reason that I decided, during our recent exercise to reposition ECA, to create, at the level of a Division (or Sub-programme in UN parlance), the African Centre for Statistics (ACS). The aims of this Centre is to scale-up ECA's efforts in the area of statistical capacity building in member States in order to more effectively and efficiently support the efforts of our member States in this area. The Centre is beginning to build partnerships with key sub regional, regional, and international institutions and member States. When fully operational, it is my expectation that this Centre will be the partner of first choice for our member States.

I wish you all successful celebrations and thank you for your kind attention.

Estamos juntos.