

Honorable Ministers;

Your Excellencies Representatives of International Organizations and Agencies;

Ambassadors and Representatives of Countries;

Directors and Representatives of Registrar Offices;

Directors and Representatives of National Statistical Offices;

Invited Guests;

Dear Participants of this Conference

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honor and privilege for me and my government to welcome you all; with special emphasis to our sisters and brothers who traveled from so far away to come to our peaceful country to attend this important and historic first Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration. In the same spirit let me extend my own and my government's sincere appreciation to the organizers and sponsors of this fundamental event for making it a reality.

The government and people of Ethiopia are overwhelmingly honored to host this remarkable gathering. This is a clear indication that you appreciate our initial efforts towards ensuring that principles of good governance and human rights are respected not only in our Region but also around the globe.

Dear Participants,

As we all know, Africa is experiencing numerous changes in various sectors and the changes are still underway. At the same time, we Africans are also struggling in addressing the challenges emanating from globalization, climate change, civil war, the current global economic slowdown, shortage of food, and diseases. In order to address these challenges based on evidences, establishment and development of reliable and timely statistical data has become more crucial than ever before. For instance, given the current situation, where the Ethiopian economy is registering an impressive growth rate of over 10% per annum, the government of Ethiopia has recognized the need for a strong National Statistical System (NSS) in managing socio-economic changes taking place in the country.

The government of Ethiopia has committed itself to an agenda of results and, to realize this, almost all public institutions are currently designing, or are in the process of implementing, Business Process Re-engineering (BPR) to bring about fundamental change in their services and pave the way for performance (results) management. Moreover, the government is implementing the poverty reduction strategy i.e. a plan for Accelerated and Sustainable Development to End Poverty (PASDEP), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other national, regional and sectoral development plans. All these require clear and systematic measurement, monitoring and evaluation of the achievement of outputs, outcomes and the impact of development policies and plan targets. In this respect, civil registration and vital statistics system is one of the fundamental measures to be taken by Africans.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

As all of you know, a good registration system should be continuous, permanent, compulsory and universal recording of the occurrence and characteristics of vital events, as prescribed by the United Nations, and it has dual purposes: administrative and legal on the one hand, and statistical on the other hand. Civil Registration is the best source of detailed, accurate, relevant and timely Vital Statistics (VS) at any level of disaggregation including the lowest administrative units of the countries. Moreover, Vital Statistics is crucial and irreplaceable component of a national statistical system as it generates numerical profile of the most precious resource of any country - its human capital. We all recognize that we are in the era where great emphasis has been given to the need for evidence based planning and on putting mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating development results. This placed statistics at the center of the development initiatives and in particular with regard to monitoring progress towards MDGs, Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems play a critical role. Through proper functioning civil registration, a person's existence can be recognized - identities, citizenships and property rights can be established and protected, crucial data can be provided to policy makers charged with designing and planning health systems; as well as provisions of services can be addressed adequately. In general, Civil Registration provides legal evidences that testifies a person's identity, serves in protection of several human rights privileges and as a critical data source for policy makers and in designing and provision of social, economic, and administrative services.

However, not everybody recognizes these important aspects, and this is where our major challenge lies. Civil Registration System in Africa has significant difficulties pertaining to the following problems, which makes the system inefficient:

- Lack of political commitment
- Inadequate registration facilities
- Inadequate field personnel
- Lack of infrastructure
- Delays of administrative procedures in force
- Poor management of data on vital records and poor preservation of vital records on civil registration
- Multiple registrations
- Unavailability of data processing and analysis tools
- Poor quality of data
- Penalty for late registration of events in some countries and not in all
- Lack of motivation to register on the part of the population due to ignorance about the importance of registration, leading to low levels of registration
- Delays in registration of events

All of these problems, which are not exhaustive, cause the data collected to be unreliable, outdated, partially completed and lead to lack of information needed for decision making as well as for development planning and policy formulation.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

In many parts of Africa, because of the above mentioned difficulties, national statistical offices are facing challenges on the production of official statistics due to lack or poorly functioning of Civil Registration and Vital Statistical Systems in their countries. Even where the system was there, it lacks completeness and adequacy for the purpose. This Ministerial Conference responsible for Civil Registration is believed to be a good opportunity to further strengthen the political commitment of African countries governments' enhance or motivate awareness of professionals in the area and the role of Civil Registration System as an input in measuring development progress and social changes in Africa. It is also expected that, this conference will give an opportunity to strengthen partnership particularly among the professionals of the region through exchange of views, ideas and best practices in the field.

It is well documented that only few countries in Africa have a fully functioning Civil Registration System with complete registration of births, deaths and cause of death, whereas the overwhelming majority lacks this system. This absence or incompleteness of civil registration creates a "Scandal of Invisibility"-where most people in Africa born and die without leaving a trace in any legal record or official statistics and even their voices unheard in any activities of their governments.

The deep-rooted causes for this are mainly associated with the lack of political will and commitment to develop effective civil registration system, lack of knowledge base about the system and more focus on project type initiatives rather than long term establishment of the Civil Registration System.

Civil Registration needs to be established or strengthened with the objectives of serving, ensuring and safeguarding the basic human rights of the people, improving the efficiency and fairness of the justice system, facilitating the health, education and other social services to the public, provision of vital statistics and establishing national identity and security system with the legal records of all citizens ... etc.

Honorable Ministers, Dear Participants,

Most developing countries, including those in our continent Africa, have made commitment to the results agenda or managing development results which aims to achieve sustained improvement in the well-being of people in their respective countries; such as more children educated, fewer infants dying, and more families are lifted out of poverty. Managing for results incorporates strategies for both Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs) and for targeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as well as other national development plans and programs which aim to make an impact on the development performance in developing countries. It is important that countries recognize civil registration as a developmental and human rights issues and our ability to monitor progress in this regard will depend on having a functional civil registration system and availability of generating reliable and timely vital statistics.

Even in the production of vital statistics, National Statistical Offices need to confront challenges linked to the fact that there is a need for intellectual, technological, logistical, political and administrative competency in data collection and processing and in ensuring data integrity.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Finally, on behalf of the Ethiopian government, I urge the participants of this conference whom representing Africa, to strongly cooperate and support each other in establishing and strengthening civil registration system that would benefit each and every individual citizen of our nations and to request your commitment in promoting civil registration as priority development agenda for Africa. At this point in time, I would also insist on Regional and International development partners, to join hands in supporting Africa in managing this significant development intervention which promotes democracy and good governance in the continent.

It is also my expectation that the experiences which will be shared during this conference, the resolutions and recommendations which will come out of this conference will improve African countries political leaders' commitment and catalyze African countries to move this agenda forward to develop as well as implement an integrated Civil Registration System with in their countries.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

With this remarks, I have the honor to declare that the Regional Ministerial Conference Responsible for Civil Registration is officially opened.

I WISH YOU ALL THE BEST!