

# *2020 African Statistics Day*

*18th November 2020*

***Theme: Modernizing National Statistical Systems to  
provide Data & Statistics to Support Sustainable Peace  
and Development in Africa***

***Statement by Dr. Sizo Mhlanga***

***United Nations Economic Commission for Africa***

Honourable Minister - National Development Planning

Perm Sec Min of National Planning

The SIDA DEP Head of Mission

UN Colleagues

All protocols observed

Ladies and gentlemen

Good morning to you all. On behalf of the Executive Secretary of the UNECA and indeed on my own behalf, it is really an honour and pleasure to join you on in the African Statistics Day (ASD) celebrations.

As you all know, the ASD was adopted in May 1990 by the Sixteenth Meeting of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa Conference of African Ministers responsible for Planning and Economic Development as an annual event celebrated on 18 November to raise public awareness on the importance of statistics in all aspects of social and economic life, create of a dialogue space between producers and users of official statistics, engage the public and private sector in production, dissemination and use of administrative and official statistics and to enhance the capacity of academicians, local government and media to access and use official statistics for evidence based decision-making and reporting.

The theme this year, ***‘Modernizing national statistical systems to provide data and statistics to support sustainable peace and development in Africa,’*** is in line with the theme of the African Union for the year 2020: “Silencing the guns: Creating conducive conditions for Africa’s development.” This follows on from the 2019 theme, ***‘Everyone counts: quality statistics for better management of forced displacement in Africa.’***

The interlinkages between development, peace security and human rights are becoming more and more evident in recent years. Development cannot happen when there is no peace and without development peace is precarious and the respect for human rights in times of conflict is never threatened. The United Nations Secretary General and the African Union Commission Chairperson committed in January 2018 to work together towards the implementation of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda

for Sustainable Development, in recognition of the nexus between peace and security, human rights and development. The two principals signed the Joint United Nations-African Union Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security (the Peace and Security Framework) and the African Union-United Nations Framework for the Implementation of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the Development Framework). The partnership has since been characterized by closer collaboration, more regular exchange of information and consultations and coordinated action.

Although over the past two decades, inter-state armed and violent conflicts have significantly diminished in Southern Africa, the region is not however immune to challenges to peace and security, armed conflict, political crises, democracy and governance deficits. The Southern African region is considered one of the richest and most peaceful regions in Africa, however, inequality threatens to destabilize the region, giving rise to challenges such as corruption, crime, abject poverty and exclusion of youth, women and minorities. If these issues are left unaddressed, they could trigger conflicts that will derail both the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and the Africa Union Agenda 2063. Most of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2063 goals are also relevant to conflict prevention peace and security, rendering peace and security both a driver and outcome of the SDGs and the AU Agenda 2063 goals. The principles of ‘inclusiveness,’ ‘leaving no one behind’ and ‘Silencing the guns: Creating conducive conditions for Africa’s development’ will be difficult to achieve in an environment in which peace and security are not guaranteed.

The theme for 2020 recognizes the need for the continent to address conflicts and violence and was selected to raise awareness among decision-makers, technical and financial partners, data producers, researchers and the general public on the critical importance of *governance* and *socioeconomic* statistics in achieving the goal of a conflict-free Africa.

The importance of data and statistics in development cannot be overemphasized and as such, the use of harmonized and reliable statistics in all fields of political, social, economic and cultural activity is critical. Socioeconomic statistics capture, not just income but also educational attainment, financial security, and subjective perceptions of social status and social class. The statistics also address to quality of life attributes as well as the opportunities and privileges afforded to people within society – thus, is a consistent and reliable predictor of a vast array of outcomes across the life span, including physical and psychological health.

***Governance, peace and security statistics*** can also contribute to the prevention and management of conflict and violence. Governance statistics take in account key principles of democratic governance, including rule of law, equity, transparency, democratic accountability and participation. The demand for governance statistics is increasing, particularly in the context of SDGs and the Goal 16 ‘Peace, justice and strong institutions.’ According to a 2020 report on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and data availability in Africa, the continent has regressed overall in respect of Goal 16. It was also noted that a few countries had sufficient data to enable in-depth progress analyses. NSOs are well placed to measure governance even though some are careful on measuring governance because of its political implications. Governance statistics should become part of their routine production, subject to the same quality standards and requirements that apply to other social, economic and environmental statistics. Peace and security statistics seek to measure violence and insecurity experienced everyday by the population that can hinder the development potential of the country. NSO’s are encouraged, working closely with all stakeholders, to incorporate the Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics (ShaSA) modules on governance, peace and security into existing surveys to produce regular statistics in these areas. Sustainable public funding should be allocated to national statistical systems in Africa to enable the regular production of core statistics relating to peace and development.

Ladies and gentlemen, COVID-19 effects have not spared us here in Southern Africa and the pandemic is already negatively impacting the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 by reversing the gains achieved in a number of areas and exacerbating already high levels of inequality within and among countries. While statistical agencies play a vital role in producing timely and reliable data to help governments respond effectively to the socio-economic and health impacts of the pandemic, they continue to face tremendous challenges as a result of the crisis at a time when data are more urgently needed than ever to inform critical interventions to save lives, restart the economy and address the long-term impact of the pandemic. The pandemic has revealed weaknesses in many systems, including the limitations of traditional methods of collecting data and statistics. The current crisis has also imposed challenges such as, disruption to operations, insufficient coordination of national statistical systems in response to the pandemic, technical support and financial resource requirements, lack of appropriate infrastructures to allow for a prompt and effective conversion to remote operations and urgent need for additional support to face these challenges. National statistical systems, in particular NSO’s must modernize by using new technologies and new data sources to maximize efficiency, so as to provide the data and statistics that are necessary to support sustainable development and peaceful coexistence in Africa.

In conclusion, I hope that the Zambia Statistics Agency, given its attendant accumulated expertise in the statistical field can continue to ensure sustainability of data collection and dissemination to enable the regular production of harmonized, reliable and timely statistics. The African Centre for Statistics will continue to support the Zambia Statistics Agency and other Agencies/NSOs in building sustainable statistical systems, including the use of modern data collection tools. It is therefore imperative that we foster collaboration among national statistical offices, migration authorities, civil societies, non-governmental organizations and international organizations to better measure and produce accurate, relevant and timely data to inform evidence-based policies.

Let me wish everyone fruitful celebrations and deliberations as we all recognize this very important day when we all endeavour to increase public awareness on the important role statistics play in all aspects of social and economic life. COVID-19 is still before us, let's all stay safe and observe the prescribed guidelines!