Address by Mr. Ahmed Lahlimi Alami,

High Commissioner for Planning

At the Opening Session of the 61st session of the World Congress of the International Statistical Institute (ISI)

**Marrakech, July 16 – 21, 2017**

**Honourable Minister,**

**Mr. President,**

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**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

By  agreeing to grant His High Patronage to the 61st session of the World Congress of the International Statistical Institute (ISI) ,  His Majesty the King, may God provide him with assistance , was keen to pay tribute to the work you do , Mr. President, yourself, to the institution over which you preside and to the international community of statisticians for the development  of Statistics, and through you , to the role of this discipline in informing public policies and their assessment by citizens. Allow me, on behalf of you all, to convey to His Majesty the King our profound gratitude for His Royal solicitude.

I would also like to express my sincere thanks to the Minister of Economy and Finance, who kindly agreed to chair with us on behalf of the Moroccan government, the solemn opening ceremony of our congress.

I should like to echo my  thanks  to the Honourable Ministers, the Ambassadors as well as the Walis and Governors, the President of the region, the Communal and Regional Councillors, the representatives of all the administrative and justice authorities for their presence among us which shows the interest they have in the congress.. Also, I cannot miss the opportunity and it is only fair to pay great tribute to the regional, provincial and local authorities for their invaluable assistance without which we would not have been able to organize this major international event with the desired efficiency.

Last but not least, I would like at the opening session to express on behalf of myself and all my collaborators our feelings of friendship and consideration to you Mr. President of ISI and to the members of the executive committee and to tell them how we have come to fully appreciate the high level of technical input and the quality of human relationships that you all have maintained throughout the work of the executive committee.

It is a real source of pride for all of us to have contributed, within a framework based on good quality partnership between the International Statistical Institute and the High Commission for Planning, to the organization of the 61st ISI World Statistics Congress (WSC). We also commend our efforts for having chosen to host it in this beautiful city of Marrakesh, which has been for centuries one of the Imperial cities of the Kingdom of Morocco which has gracefully synthesized its plural identity: i.e. Arab-Amazigh, Hispanic-Andalutian and African-Saharian. I hope that despite the studious dimension of your stay, you will be able to experience much of what it has to offer and observe the extent to which this identity synthesis continues to fuel its business activity, its cultural diversity and attractive tourism.

**Mr. Minister, Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Our congress convenes its session in an international environment that provides ground rather for optimism. The global economy seems to be beginning to emerge from the crisis which has persisted since 2007-2008. It aims to return to more sustainable growth which is likely to be driven by countries that have prepared themselves for global competitiveness by taking advantage of the opportunities offered and that would have adapted accordingly by the digital revolution and the resources of the green economy their microeconomic ecosystems, macroeconomic management and, more broadly, their model of development in the paradigm of a new emerging political economy.

From a statistical point of view, in particular in the official sphere and especially in developing countries, this context should be, it seems to us, largely marked by the challenge that this discipline would have to face during the process of SDG's implementation to deal with their technical and institutional implications, the legal nature of its status, the scope of its responsibilities and the way in which its products are elaborated and disseminated.

Hence, it has not seemed impertinent to raise some aspects of this question in this opening session of the Congress before this arena of experts of what I shall call ‘’the International Academy of Statistics’’.

As is well known, this agenda is part of a process that is a profound conceptual and methodological break with the framework of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), marked by the sectoral nature of the objectives and the restrictive targeting of beneficiaries.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals, on the other hand, are directed to all members of the international community, regardless of level of development. With the 169 targets that detail their architecture and application methods and the societal framework, they involve all spheres of the economy, society, the environment and culture. They are intended, both at the operational level of implementation and at the methodological level of evaluation, to be elaborated through the interactivity of their approach and the interplay of their societal impact.

With this global approach, SDGs ultimately outline a genuine development model driven by the overall determinants of total factor productivity. Thus, National Statistical Information Systems would be subjected to severe strain in the search for data and the development of the indicators required for the monitoring and evaluation of policies concerning the implementing the international Sustainable Development Agenda contextualized in the economic and social realities of their countries. In this context, it should be recalled, to illustrate the scale of the difficulties in this area, that the number of statistical indicators so far identified for this purpose would amount to some 230. For many of them, the concepts and methods of development are not yet clearly defined or are not ready to be developed.

By their nature, the data required, where it exists, is often distributed in several administrative departments, public or private institutions. Data is generally incomplete or difficult to use because it does not meet the standards required by statistical and accounting operations. In the case of imperative need, data obtained by resorting directly to households through often cumbersome and expensive surveys

Who could then convince the various ministerial departments, public institutions, professional bodies and all the holders of basic information that a national statistical information system cannot be reduced to a specialized body whatever its Legal status, expertise of its human resources or its institutional weight. Any holder of information useful for the National Accounts and for the evaluation of public policies is accountable for the quality of the national statistics and should therefore acquire the competence to comply with the standards laid down by the United Nations.

**Ladies and Gentlemen**,

In these circumstances, the relevance of the Sustainable Development Goals approach is certainly proven. The ambition of their universality is virtuous and constitutes a sign of more solidary international relations. Its scope could be limited, however, particularly in view of the disparity in the countries' ability to take advantage from the benefits of the global revolution in the collection, use and dissemination of data.

Alongside national and private powers, with databases of dimensions and varieties experiencing exponential growth , many countries still struggle to have sufficiently robust national statistical systems to help them better understand and better serve their economic realities and the living conditions of their populations.

In this respect, it is unfortunate to recall that several countries in the world, and especially in the African continent, had scarcely achieved by the end of 2015 the seven (7) Millennium Development Goals. Several of them do not yet have the statistical capacities required to provide basic economic and social indicators, let alone a National Accounting System that meets the standards adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission.

In these countries, and in many others, where the effects of climate change are felt, the case, statisticians note a dramatic weakness in the development of environmental statistics. They deplore the lack of reliable benchmarks for monitoring the deterioration of the natural and social ecosystems which constitute the living conditions of a population increasingly dedicated to climate-related migration.

In the light of world realities, is there not reason to fear that international disparities in statistical capacity, which are now evident, be accentuated by the uneven development of the global digital economy.

With the spread of mobile usage, the extension of geolocation, the power of artificial intelligence and the horizons that it opens for inter connected objects and augmented reality, are we not going to a world where many countries and, more and more, disadvantaged social groups, are likely to continue to be, often without their knowledge, a source of a multiplicity of information the use of which escapes them and powerless in the context of their own National statistical information system.

In order to give a strong signal of the importance we attach to this twofold question which arises from the urgent need for a rapid development of environmental statistics and a wider access of developing countries and in particular African countries to the benefits of the revolution of data that the current world is experiencing that HCP is organizing, alongside this congress two events : One on "What Statistical Approaches to Measure the Environment and the Effects of Climate Change" and the other on a theme entitled "The Data Revolution at the Service of SDGs".

In the end, I will not wish to conclude this modest intervention without expressing strongly our conviction that, in the context of profound changes in the world economy, knowledge, values and international relations, the strengthening of national statistical information systems in developing countries, particularly in Africa, is a decisive factor in the economic development, social progress and institutional democratization of these countries. We should therefore make every effort to make it an international recommendation to raise the need for it to be a categorical imperative of the sustainable development agenda by 2030.

It is a true Marshall Plan of statistics that Africa needs in order to lay out in 2030 horizon, the results of the performances at the level of the geostrategic weight of its continent and the greatness of its civilization.

We are therefore convinced that statistics as a medium for development should be, before it is too late, set up by international cooperation as a categorical imperative of the Sustainable Development Agenda by 2030.

With this ardent hope, allow me, Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen, to accept the renewed expressions of my welcome to our country and full success to our work.

Thank you.