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Statement

by

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High-level Panel discussion on
The Report of the Secretary-General on
the Second Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International
Plan of Action on Ageing

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Review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action
pertaining to the situation of social groups:

Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002

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Thank you Chair

Director General, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to present the outcome of the third UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing, which took place in Vienna, Austria, in September 2012. On that occasion I had the pleasure of taking part in the high-level panel discussion on the report of the Secretary-General on the Second Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing.

Let me start with some general remarks regarding the Ministerial Conference.

30 years after the first World Assembly on Ageing in Vienna and 10 years after the International Plan of Action on Ageing, Austria hosted the third Ministerial Conference on Ageing entitled “Ensuring a society for all ages: Promoting quality of life and active ageing”.

With 500 participants from 50 UNECE Member States, 30 of them represented by Ministers, Deputy Ministers or State Secretaries, the Conference was very successful, demonstrating the importance attached to population ageing in the region.

On the day before the start of the Ministerial Conference, representatives of civil society gathered in two parallel forums to discuss the regional implementation strategy for the International Plan of Action from their perspectives. NGO representatives called on Member States to step up the monitoring and evaluation of the Plan’s implementation and to recognize the role of civil society. The Research Forum stressed the need for more evidence-based policy-making in implementing the Plan. The importance of these contributions was acknowledged in the Ministerial Declaration.

As one of the results of the First Review and Appraisal held in León (Spain) in 2007, a UNECE Working Group on Ageing was established in 2008. And it was this Group

that agreed on four themes for the Vienna conference and put them in place as priorities for action in the five-year period until 2017. These priority themes, which cover the 10 commitments of the Regional Implementation Strategy, are reflected in the Vienna Ministerial Declaration. The Declaration was unanimously adopted on the 20th of September 2012 and will serve as a guideline for regional and national ageing-related policies in the UNECE region for the next five years.

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished delegates,

Let me now go into a little more detail regarding the Ministerial Declaration.

The Declaration calls for very concrete steps for the further implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing in the UNECE region over the next five years. This entails steps for sustainable policy-making for - and together with - older people, and for intergenerational solidarity.

As I have mentioned, our discussion process was guided by four priority themes, namely:

1. Promoting longer working life and maintaining workability,
2. Participation, non-discrimination and social inclusion of older persons,
3. Creating an enabling environment for health, independence and ageing in dignity, and
4. Stimulating intergenerational dialogue and solidarity between generations as a shared responsibility.

It became clear early in the process that active ageing and intergenerational solidarity are directly linked, and that the speed of progress in implementing the Regional Strategy for the International Plan of Action differs across the region.

It also turned out that the focus of the four themes is closely connected to the dramatic structural change in our societies. Where people can expect to live longer, it is particularly important to keep them healthy, active and included, and to allow

them to evolve.

This clearly affects the labour market, which must be prepared for a greater number of older workers. The right to work in old age calls for a change in outlook among employers and employees. Participation of all groups, including the elderly, is key for an all-inclusive society. This requires a secure income, a sustainable pension system, and the reduction of poverty. The potential of older people, their skills, experience and wisdom are powerful tools for further development. There is a willingness to tackle issues such as prejudice and discrimination against older people, which hinder intergenerational equity.

Furthermore, the Declaration states that Member States will promote the creation of age-friendly workplaces, health promotion, rehabilitation and age management, taking into account that intergenerational solidarity is the responsibility of every enterprise, no matter how big or small. In Austria, for example, we have launched a program, "fit2work", which promotes healthy workplaces and rehabilitation instead of early retirement.

In a society where people live ever longer, UNECE Member States have recognized the importance of geriatrics and gerontology. Special attention must be given to preventive measures, early diagnosis and treatment, as well as care - in particular long-term care and social protection for people with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. Some Member States have acknowledged that a growing number of special care facilities will be needed for the growing number of persons affected by these diseases. It is essential to expand services to meet the rising demand for long-term care and assistance, as well as to support family carers and make work and care duties better compatible. Increasing health promotion measures reduces the probability of illness and disability, ensures physical and mental functioning in old age, and fosters independent living.

In order to strengthen intergenerational solidarity, we must develop and implement financially sound and sustainable strategies which embrace the needs and abilities

of current and future generations. Solidarity between generations is at the centre of every society, regardless of its stage of development. In order to integrate all generations into the labour market, policies for creating new jobs for the old and the young must be complementary. This is also the best way to ensure the financial sustainability of social protection systems.

We have also recognized the value of fostering the joint volunteering of people of all ages. Voluntary work and voluntary commitment, especially in organisations for senior citizens and community assistance, are indicators of participation and solidarity between generations. In Austria, for example, voluntary work is widespread - from fire fighting services to sports organisations and cultural institutions. Nearly 45 per cent of all Austrians do some kind of voluntary work.

Some Member States have pointed out the importance of strengthening civil society by supporting older people in representing their interests and participating in political, economic, social and cultural life. A key element of Austria's policy on senior citizens is giving them a voice in all issues that affect them. This is why we have set up, under the Law on Promoting the Interests of the Older Generation, a Senior Citizens Advisory Council to express the views of older people vis-à-vis political decision-makers.

The declaration also stresses the importance of regional cooperation, possibilities to share best national practices and search for possible solutions by endorsing the work done by the UNECE Working Group in our region.

Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished delegates,

In conclusion, let me say that I am proud of what we achieved in Vienna, based on the Second Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, in particular defining in detail the four priority themes that have set the stage for the Madrid Plan's implementation period till 2017. I know about the many challenges we face, but by working together and sharing information we will be

better prepared to tackle these challenges. And I am pleased that the potential of older people and their contribution to society became more visible during our talks in Vienna. I am confident that we can reach our policy goals and look forward to the next Review and Appraisal in 2017.

Thank you Chair