

**Statement by  
Mr. XIAO Caiwei  
Vice President of the China National Committee on Ageing (CNCA)  
at 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  
Commission on Social Development  
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Conference Room 4**

Mr Chairperson,  
Distinguished panelists,

It is a pleasure for me to be here with you today to provide the perspectives of the Asian and Pacific region with regard to the review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing.

Asia-Pacific is at the forefront of the global phenomenon of population ageing. The number of older persons is rising at a pace unprecedented and a scale unmatched by any other region in the world.

This is the background against which the member States of the ESCAP region gathered in Bangkok at the Asia-Pacific Intergovernmental Meeting to review progress in the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, organized by ESCAP in September 2012. As the Chairperson of this Meeting it is my privilege to present to you the findings and recommendations from the Asia-Pacific region.

**The review of the Madrid International Plan of Action comes at a very critical time for us - the Asia-Pacific region is facing unprecedented demographic transition.**

Currently, the region is home to over half of the world's elderly population. By 2050, however, almost two thirds of the world's older persons will be living in the Asia-Pacific.

The population of older persons in Asia-Pacific will triple to 1.3 billion in 2050. One fourth of these older persons will be older than 80 years of age.

While the timing and pace of ageing differs across Asia and the Pacific, all countries will experience an increasingly older population in the years to come. Whereas the demographic transition took 100 years or more to occur in Europe, countries in our region are now going through this process within the span of three decades or less.

Moreover, many countries in Asia-Pacific will grow old before they grow rich.

**Such a rapid increase in the elderly population has serious and far-reaching social, economic and political implications.**

Shrinking working-age populations will affect future economic growth. Increasing old-age dependency ratios will mean fewer people in work will have to support a growing number of older persons.

This will also place a significant strain on social security systems, infrastructure and the provision of health care services. Elder care services will particularly feel the strain, as many systems currently in place already struggle to meet even today's needs.

Older women are particularly vulnerable as the majority of older persons are women, and a disproportionate percentage of the region's poor are women.

**As a region, Asia-Pacific is responding to these challenges.**

Mr Chairperson,

As part of the regional review of the Madrid International Plan of Action, three key preparatory activities took place in the Asia-Pacific region. The first was a Preparatory Meeting organized by ESCAP, and hosted by the Government of China, in Beijing in November 2011.

The second was a regional intergovernmental survey, conducted by the ESCAP secretariat, on progress and challenges thus far in the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action.

And the third activity was the convening of the Asia-Pacific Intergovernmental Meeting on the Second Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action, held in September 2012, in Bangkok.

**The regional survey showed that much progress has been achieved in the region, including in:**

- the development of national plans on ageing;
- the establishment of national coordination mechanisms;
- the strengthening of social protection systems;
- participation of older persons in policy formulation and review;
- adoption of policies and plans to ensure accessible, affordable and available health-care services; and
- the development of community and residential services for older persons.

**At the same time, several challenges remain, such as:**

- ensuring dedicated resources to support the implementation of national plans and policies;
- expanding employment opportunities for older persons;
- expanding social protection coverage for older persons;
- increasing investment in health-care provision;
- the need for specific legislation to protect the rights of older persons; and
- the need to address the gender dimensions of ageing.

Mr Chairperson,

Given the need to prepare effectively for the ageing of our societies, member States from 30 Asia-Pacific countries together with civil society gathered at the ESCAP Intergovernmental Meeting to share experiences, strengthen regional cooperation and reached consensus on the Asia-Pacific input to the current review of the Madrid International Plan of Action.

Let me highlight some of the key findings and outcomes that emerged from our deliberations.

In the Asia-Pacific region there is a rich diversity of practices and experiences to implement policies and programmes to prepare for ageing societies.

**Our member states agreed that policies and legal frameworks that safeguard and recognize the fundamental rights of older persons to live dignified, independent and healthy lives, are fundamental.**

We know that preparing for an ageing society requires multisectoral responses. Appropriate policies and frameworks exist to varying degrees, and most Governments in our region have national coordinating mechanisms, some with the Head of Government serving as the Chair of inter-ministerial committees.

**Another key conclusion from our region is that income security is essential to guaranteeing the livelihood and dignity of older persons.**

Therefore, we need innovative measures to broaden employment opportunities for older persons and ensure decent work. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on eliminating employment barriers so that older persons can remain in, or re-enter, the workforce.

**The other vital component of income security is social protection.**

While many countries in our region have made progress in this area, most countries lack comprehensive pension coverage. Social protection in Asia and the Pacific needs to be strengthened. This is particularly important for women and those who are the most vulnerable in our societies.

**As we grow older, health and well-being remains equally important.** Some countries in our region have successfully introduced universal health-care coverage. However, maintaining good health into old age **requires health systems that are adapted to the needs of older persons.** Health systems must take a holistic approach and also address the preventive and psycho-social dimensions of health care.

**Gender inequality and discrimination against women is perpetuated into old age.** Older women are therefore particularly vulnerable to poverty and social isolation,

largely lacking employment opportunities and access to social protection. One particular concern in our region is discrimination against widowed older women, which requires greater attention.

Mr Chairperson,

Our rich discussions at the ESCAP Intergovernmental Meeting led to the adoption of the Bangkok Statement on the Asia-Pacific Review of the Implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing.

The Bangkok Statement calls upon our governments, among others, to:

- Accord priority to addressing the rights of older persons in legal and policy frameworks;
- Ensure coordinated multi-sectoral responses and the mainstreaming of ageing issues into national policies and programmes;
- Increase national awareness, capacity and resources to prepare for and respond to the demographic transition;
- Develop inclusive social protection systems, with particular attention given to older persons and their vulnerability to poverty and social isolation;
- Accord priority to mainstreaming the gender dimension into national responses.

The Bangkok Statement also contains specific recommendations under each of the three pillars of the Madrid International Plan of Action, including the need to:

- Remove barriers to the participation of older persons in the labour market and ensure decent work;
- Address the special needs of older persons in rural and remote communities, older persons living in poverty, older women and the “oldest old”;
- Adapt health systems to the needs of older persons through an integrated continuum of care;
- Allocate adequate resources for the training of caregivers, including informal caregivers;
- Create and promote enabling environments to support the active participation of older persons in society;

- Conduct research and address abuse and violence against older persons;
- Promote a positive image of ageing and of older persons.

Mr Chairperson,

The Asia-Pacific region hopes that the next programming cycle of the Madrid International Plan of Action will build upon the achievements thus far and address the remaining and emerging challenges that I have outlined.

China is committed to supporting this process and is working with other countries to achieve the vision of an inclusive society. As the sponsor of ESCAP resolution 67/5 on the full and effective implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing in the Asia-Pacific region, China is promoting South-South cooperation in the sharing of national experiences and good practices, including hosting international forums on a number of issues related to ageing, including elderly care services.

As the great philosopher Lao Tzu said "A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step". We have taken that key step in our collective journey to build societies where older persons can live in dignity and contribute to socio-economic development.

I thank you.