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**Statement
to the 40th Session of the Commission on Population and Development**

**Agenda Item 3:
Follow-up actions to the recommendations
of the International Conference on Population and Development**

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Mr Chairman, Delegates,

Thank you for allowing me the honour of presenting to you an overview of the activities of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) that address changing age structures of populations and their implications.

In 2002, shortly after the World Assembly on Ageing in Madrid, the ECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing in Berlin adopted the Regional Implementation Strategy (RIS) of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), which includes a concrete catalogue of measures in the form of ten commitments. Regarding international co-operation, the Strategy calls upon the ECE secretariat to assist Member States in its implementation and evaluation of achievements.

In this work, the secretariat is assisted by an expert task force as well as by the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research that develops indicators, collects data and maintains a website on monitoring MIPAA/RIS. Both the meetings of the task force and the technical work are supported by the Federal Government of Austria under provisions of a Memorandum of Understanding with ECE.

To facilitate co-ordination and exchange of information between countries about implementing the Regional Strategy, the ECE secretariat has established a network of focal points on ageing that now covers a large majority of ECE Member States. The government officials acting as focal points are expected to play a key role in the review and appraisal of MIPAA/RIS on the national level and act as primary contact points in Member States for regional level activities.

ECE secretariat has collected information on national action in response to population ageing with two questionnaires, in 2004 and 2006, respectively. The findings from these questionnaires were discussed at the first Meeting of Focal Points on Ageing in November 2006 that the ECE co-organized with the Government of Spain and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). This meeting

provided a region-wide forum to discuss modalities of follow-up to MIPAA/RIS, to exchange information on good practices, to discuss policies pertaining to the labour market and social protection and to identify capacity development needs.

In the framework of the first five-year cycle of review and appraisal of MIPAA, the UN regional commissions have been invited to convene regional conferences of review and appraisal. In the ECE region, such a conference will take place from 6 to 8 November this year in León, at the invitation of the Government of Spain. This UNECE Conference on Ageing is expected to become an important milestone in reviewing the progress and in identifying priorities for further co-ordinated actions in response to population ageing. The last day of the Conference is planned to be held on ministerial level and is expected to adopt a political declaration. A civil society forum will be organized one day before the Conference.

ECE secretariat has developed guidelines for the focal points on ageing to organize existing as well as newly collected material on ageing related policies and programmes into a concise country report. These country reports, due by 16 April, will provide the main source of information for the regional summary report on ageing, which the ECE secretariat will prepare for the Conference.

The content, format and preparations of the ECE Conference on Ageing have been discussed at the meeting of focal points on ageing in November 2006 as well as at the expert meeting in this February in Vienna. In the Vienna meeting, co-organized by the ECE secretariat and the Federal Government of Austria, leading experts on ageing addressed concrete questions in their areas of expertise and made suggestions for background documents of the Conference, its agenda and the draft political declaration. Relying on the country reports and expert inputs, the intergovernmental open-ended Preparatory Committee will elaborate the content and decide on the modalities of the Conference at its meeting on 12 and 13 July. International organisations and accredited NGOs will participate in the preparatory process.

While Europe has the oldest population among world regions, many countries of the ECE region still have a relatively young population and changes in the age structure concern mainly the decrease in the proportion of children. Under such circumstances ageing is frequently not considered a priority and awareness of the implications of changing age structures may be insufficient. Other countries face rapid increase in the proportion of older persons while preoccupied with their economy in transition. In March this year, the ECE and the UNFPA co-organized a workshop on the issues specifically relevant for the countries of Eastern and South-eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. The objective of the workshop was to develop capacities for formulation of ageing related policies and programmes and to involve countries from these sub-regions in the process of review and appraisal of MIPAA/RIS.

While MIPAA/RIS mainly deals with the consequences of demographic change, many European governments share a concern about low or very low levels of fertility and are implementing policies to support families. In this regard, I would finally like to mention the Generations and Gender Programme of the ECE, which aims at improving the ability to work out sustainable responses to the policy challenges posed by changing family and intergenerational relationships and by low and very low fertility. More information on this programme will be provided under the agenda item 5 on the secretariat's work in the field of population.

Thank you for your attention.