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Statement by
Ms. Keiko Osaki
Chief, Population and Social Integration Section
Emerging Social Issues Division
United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

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

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the past two decades, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), has been a focal point on ageing and has been widely recognized as the leading voice for older persons. This is perhaps no coincidence, because, owing to notable declines in fertility and mortality, the rapid process of population ageing has become an emerging reality that challenges a growing number of countries in the region.

According to our latest estimates, the Asia-Pacific region is home to 400 million or the largest number of older persons in the world. The number is increasing at the rate twice as high as the growth rate of the total population. In the region as a whole, currently 10 per cent of the population is the aged 60 years or over. The proportion is expected to rise further: by the year 2050 approximately one in four people in the region will be older persons.

The social, economic and health implications of this rapid population ageing are profound and far-reaching. Many countries in the region do not have sufficient national social security for older persons. While the tradition of older persons co-residing with their family members is generally the norm, traditional means of family support are steadily eroding in most societies. As health-care infrastructure is still weak in many countries of the region, the additional burden of caring for older persons will further stretch it. With rapid urbanization and increased mobility of people, the situation is often worsening, leading to many older persons being left in the rural areas without caregivers.

Distinguished Delegates,

In the Asia and the Pacific, there have been several inspiring attempts to highlight ageing issues at the regional level, opening doors of thought and bringing about some possible actions to be taken. But perhaps no attempt opened more doors than the

Regional Meeting on a Plan of Action on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific, held in Macao, China, in 1998. The Macao Plan of Action adopted at the meeting explicitly revealed the link between population ageing and fiscal demands of Governments, especially in relation to social security, health and social services.

In 2002, the United Nations convened the Second World Assembly on Ageing, and adopted a landmark document, the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), calling for a shift in strategic planning, from needs-based approaches which implied that older persons were passive consumers of welfare benefits, to a rights-based approach of equality and opportunity.

In alignment with this global direction, during the same year, Governments in Asia and the Pacific met together and adopted a regional strategy known as the Shanghai Implementation Strategy, to implement the MIPAA and the Macao Plan of Action on Ageing. This strategy has helped many countries in the development of more coherent approaches to address ageing issues and accord more attention to the challenges and opportunities that the phenomenon brings about.

Distinguished Delegates,

Five years have passed since the adoption of MIPAA and, consistent with UN system-wide review modalities, MIPAA will be subjected to a review and appraisal in 2007- 2008. In this connection, ESCAP will convene from 9 to 11 October 2007 a High-level Meeting on the Regional Review of the Implementation of Shanghai Implementation Strategy for the Madrid and Macao Plans of Action on Ageing, in Macao, China, bringing together all members and associate members of ESCAP.

The preparations for this regional meeting have been underway. In 2006, ESCAP conducted the survey on the implementation of the Madrid and Macao Plans of Action, by sending a questionnaire to all Governments in the region. In March 2007, ESCAP organized the Expert Group Meeting on the Regional Preparations for the Global Review of Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging in Bangkok, inviting some 15 experts on ageing. ESCAP also plans to organize a Regional Seminar on Social, Health and Economic Consequences of Population Ageing in Bangkok in July 2007. The outcomes of these meetings, together with those of previous ones, will directly feed in the upcoming High-level Review Meeting on Ageing in October.

Distinguished Delegates,

Population ageing is the demographic phenomena which the Asia-Pacific region never experienced in its long history. The growing size of older population and its proportionate share will emerge as key challenges in many countries of the region. ESCAP is ready to pay closer attention to the issues, and work closely with the Governments and other stakeholders, through regional research and the facilitation of exchanges in policy information and experiences among countries in the region.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.