15 October 2015

Statement by H.E. Mr. Mogens Lykketoft,
President of the 70th Session of the General Assembly,
At the United Nations International Day of Older Persons 2015 –
Sustainability and Age-Inclusiveness in the Urban Environment

Ladies and Gentlemen, good morning to you all.

Let me begin by thanking the NGO Committee on Ageing and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, for organizing today's panel discussion which discusses an issue which is not only relevant to almost everything the UN does, but which is dear to each and every one of us as human beings.

As has been widely reported in recent years, older persons make up the fastest growing section of the general population. Today, people aged 60 or over constitute 11 percent of the world population and it is expected that this figure will double by 2050. This demographic change poses both challenges and opportunities.

For instance, in relation to income security, the Secretary General's Report on the matters points to the fact that many older adults, in both developed and developing countries, are unable to meet their basic expenses and are struggling with rising housing costs, health care bills, and inadequate nutrition. In a related manner, the World Social Protection Report suggests that only 42 percent of the working population may expect to receive an old-age pension in the future.

The provision of appropriate health services to older persons and the requirement to realign the health systems with the needs of ageing societies, remains another important challenge. And it is of course even more saddening to consider how older persons are suffering in the midst of the current global refugee crisis.

Challenges faced by vulnerable groups, including older persons, are of course often deeply related to the environment in which they live, whether urban or rural. The rapid and enormous change we see globally in the economic and social fabric of our world's cities, however, presents us with both challenges and opportunities. Today's discussions can serve to highlight some of the priorities and actions needed to make the urban environment one that is considerate and inclusive of older persons and can feed into the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development in October 2016.

Over the past number of years, however, the international community has already taken some important steps to empower older persons, to promote and protect their rights, to raise awareness of ageing issues and to strengthen national capacities in this area.

The adoption of the Madrid International Plan of Action in 2002 was an important milestone to this end. The establishment of the "Open-ended Working Group on Ageing" by the General Assembly and the appointment of an "Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons" by the Human Rights Council were further important steps.

The 2030 Agenda adopted just a few weeks ago, is another international response which has great potential to empower and improve the lives of older persons. While there are specific references to older persons in the Goal on Hunger and the Goal on cities and human settlements, each of the 17 sustainable development goals are critically important to delivering a world in which all people including older persons, can live in peace and dignity.

Indeed the strength of the new Agenda is that it puts forward an integrated, transformational and people-centred approach to ending poverty and achieving sustainable development. At its very core is a commitment to care for, protect and empower the most vulnerable people in society and to prioritise those furthest behind first.

Rapid implementation and early progress over the coming year will be crucial if we are to maintain the momentum around the new Agenda. A multi-stakeholder approach must be at the centre of our collective efforts and, in this regard, civil society and those who seek to empower older persons at all levels must be ready to engage directly with other actors to both advance and monitor implementation.

I wish you successful discussions.

Thank you.