



**Statement of
Mr. Craig Mokhiber
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
Open-ended Working Group on the Human Rights of Older Persons
Organizational session
New York, 15 February 2011**

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, colleagues,

I am honored to be with you today on behalf of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and in support of the Open-Ended Working Group on the Human Rights of Older Persons. OHCHR welcomes this important development, and salutes the decision of the General Assembly to focus dedicated attention to this critical human rights issue. We are honored to join together with our colleagues in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in supporting the Working Group in its historic deliberations.

The global situation of older persons is marked by many critical human rights challenges. A broad range of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights are at stake. Discrimination, neglect and abuse targeting members of this large and growing group of women and men are common in all regions, and current trends indicate that the situation is set to worsen. Laws and policies have lagged behind growing demographic needs, in areas as vital and compelling as social protection, pensions, health services, participation in public life and legal capacity. The High Commissioner for Human Rights has noted in a public statement released today that “the irony of the elderly being excluded from the very societies and institutions that they have built is too tragic to ignore.” Stronger mechanisms of protection are urgently needed at the national, regional and international levels.

Indeed, the situation of older persons now ranks among the most pressing policy issues for governments and public institutions around the world. This Working Group is therefore a much-needed response to the growing calls for better protection at the international level. Under its mandate, it will draw on the experience and expertise of Member States, the UN system, NGOs, national human rights institutions, human rights mandate-holders and treaty bodies, and a range of stakeholders. It is tasked with strengthening the protection of the human rights of older persons, considering the existing human rights framework, identifying gaps and the means to address them, and the feasibility of new instruments and measures. Each of these is a vital and urgent mission. And in each, the Working Group can count on our full engagement and support.

We thank you, and we wish you success in your deliberations.