

**Statement of
Mr. Thomas Stelzer
Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs
Open-ended Working Group on Rights of Older Persons
Organizational Session
New York, 15 February 2011**

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, colleagues,

It is a great honour and pleasure to be here today and witness the beginnings of this important working group.

In 2002, the International Community adopted the first truly global blueprint for a society for all ages: The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing.

Sadly, 10 years into the implementation of the Madrid Plan, national development strategies continue to be short of addressing older persons' right to participate in society and development and to live safe and dignified lives.

With the number of persons aged 60 and over increasing at an unprecedented rate and heading towards 2 billion by 2050, it is becoming increasingly clear that development and poverty reduction strategies will only succeed if they embrace older persons' entitlements to income, to seek employment, to safety and protection, access to health, and even access to education.

For too long, demographic ageing and its perceived negative consequences has been the point of departure for any discussion about older persons. That however, is only one prism through which we may view reality – another one, and in my view a more valid one, is the human perspective, the perspective of the individual affected, the older person him- or herself.

The decision of the General Assembly to establish this working group on the rights of older persons provides a unique opportunity to broaden and deepen our vision of the challenges of a society for all ages.

Indeed the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing notes that “the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms is essential for the creation of an inclusive society for all ages, in which older persons participate fully and without discrimination and on the basis of equality”.

I wish to state my Department's commitment to supporting your work and wish you a fruitful discussion and outcome.

Thank you very much.