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FEDERAL MINISTRY OF
LABOUR, SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND
CONSUMER PROTECTION

Statement

by

Mr. Markus WINDEGGER

Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs

and Consumer Protection

of

the Republic of Austria

**Open-ended Working Group on Ageing
for the purpose of strengthening the protection of the human
rights of older persons**

4th working session, 12-15 August 2013

Agenda Item 4

Panel 1: Promotion and protection of the human rights and dignity of older persons:
contributions from the second global review and appraisal of the Madrid International
Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002

New York

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Outcome of the Third United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Ministerial Conference on Ageing “Ensuring a society for all ages: Promoting quality of life and active ageing”, 19-20 September 2012.

Thank you Mr. Chair

It is an honour for me to present the outcome of the third UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing “*Ensuring a society for all ages: Promoting quality of life and active ageing*”, which took place in Vienna, Austria, in September 2012 exactly 30 years after the first World Assembly on Ageing in Vienna and 10 years after the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing.

With 500 participants from 50 UNECE Member States, 30 of them represented by Ministers, Deputy Ministers or State Secretaries, the Conference was very successful, demonstrating the importance attached to population ageing in the region.

As one of the results of the First Review and Appraisal held in León (Spain) in 2007, a UNECE Working Group on Ageing was established in 2008. It aims to foster international exchange, support and cooperation in implementing the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (2002) and the UNECE Regional Implementation Strategy (Berlin, 2002).

The Working Group acted as the Preparatory Committee for the Vienna Ministerial Conference 2012. At its Fourth Meeting in November 2011 the Group agreed on four themes for the Vienna conference based on the achievements since 2007 and even more so as priorities for action for the next five-year cycle (2012 – 2017). The very same themes are reflected in the declaration where the essence of the ten commitments of the UNECE Regional Implementation Strategy was condensed into the four main goals:

1. Encouraging longer working life and maintain ability to work
2. Promote participation, non-discrimination and social inclusion of older persons
3. Promote and safeguard dignity, health and independence in older age
4. Maintain and enhance intergenerational solidarity

The draft of the Vienna Ministerial Declaration was prepared in close consultation with all Member States as well as the representatives of the NGOs. Two rounds of full-scale electronic consultations and a round for reaching general approval of the text were organised between early April and late August 2012. The active involvement of Member States and NGOs was reflected in numerous initiatives and measures in all policy areas which have been developed in the last 5 years and the implementation of which will be given priority in the future.

The Declaration calls for very concrete steps for the further implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing in the UNECE region over the next five years. This entails steps for sustainable policy-making together with older people and intergenerational solidarity. It became clear early in the process that the speed of progress in implementing the Regional Strategy for the International Plan of Action differs across the region. It also turned out that the focus of the four themes is closely connected to the dramatic structural change in our societies. Where people can expect to live longer, it is particularly important to keep them healthy, active and included.

Healthy and active ageing means at the same time that more people will stay longer in the labour market, which must be prepared for a greater number of older workers. The right to work in old age calls for a change in outlook among employers and employees. Participation of all groups, including the elderly, is key for an all-inclusive society. The potential of older people, their skills, experience and wisdom are powerful tools for further development. Present prejudices against older persons and discrimination, which constrain the achievement of intergenerational equity and reciprocity, will remain challenges also in the future.

Besides aiming to ensure that older persons maintain the highest possible level of health, Member States should facilitate access to age-appropriate, affordable and effective high-quality goods and services, improve mobility through innovative methods, technologies and age-friendly environments. The promotion of architectural alterations and innovative housing designs aimed at adapting to the changing needs and functional abilities of persons as they age are of utmost importance.

In a society where people live ever longer, UNECE Member States have recognized the importance of geriatrics and gerontology. Special attention must be given to

preventive measures, early diagnosis and treatment, as well as care - in particular long-term care and social protection for people with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. Some Member States have acknowledged that a growing number of special care facilities will be needed for the growing number of persons affected by these diseases. It is essential to expand services to meet the rising demand for long-term care and assistance. Increasing health promotion measures reduces the probability of illness and disability, ensures physical and mental functioning in old age, and fosters independent living.

In order to strengthen intergenerational solidarity, we must develop and implement financially sound and sustainable strategies which embrace the needs and abilities of current and future generations. Solidarity between generations also means adequate and sustainable social protection of older persons while recognizing that older men and women continue to make important contributions to their communities in various ways, including continued employment, performing non-paid caring of younger and older family members, participating in volunteering as well as cash and in-kind transfers to benefit younger members of their families and communities. Solidarity between generations is at the centre of every society, regardless of its stage of development.

Some Member States stated that ageism should be combated through awareness campaigns and by encouraging the media and other opinion-making actors to give an age-balanced image of society, highlight the positive aspects of ageing, develop non-discriminatory images of older persons and disseminate information about ageing as a natural phase in individual development.

It is also important to take into account the diverse needs of a growing number of older persons among ethnic minorities and migrants to ensure their integration and equal participation in society. Moreover, reducing material deprivation, poverty, social exclusion among older persons, especially older women and facilitating their participation, in decision-making processes at all levels, both directly and through organizations of older persons across civil society is key to an all-inclusive society.

The declaration also stresses the importance of regional cooperation, possibilities to share best national practices and search for possible solutions by endorsing the work done by the UNECE Working Group in the region. For reaching the policy goals in

the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and the UNECE Regional Implementation Strategy during the period 2013-2017, Member States stressed the importance of mainstreaming ageing and promoting active ageing in the national policy processes.

Mr. Chair

Before concluding, let me mention a few sentences on how the UNECE Working Group on Ageing is going to focus its work during the 3rd cycle in order to realize the priorities outlined in the Ministerial Declaration. The work started with taking stock on good practices for a new Policy Brief on Ageing dedicated to the issues of Abuse of older persons - it will be launched on 1 October 2013, on the day of older persons. Although the more detailed work programme for the 3rd cycle will be discussed this fall, at its 5th meeting in November 2012 the Group decided to establish four smaller discussion groups corresponding to the four main goals outlined in the Vienna Ministerial Declaration. These groups serve as a forum to deliberate on a limited number of in-depth issues, exchange experiences and good practices and prepare a short summary that will be presented at the 6th meeting of the Working Group on Ageing.

It was also agreed upon that leaders and rapporteurs of the four groups get together ahead of the next Working Group on Ageing Meeting to discuss the work within the groups, their possible outputs and also how to strengthen the engagement of the group members, making them more efficient contributors to implementing the Ministerial Declaration. The meeting is scheduled to take place on 16-17 September 2013 in Vienna, Austria.

In this regard we hope to draw the attention of policy makers, the media and the general public to the issues of population and individual ageing, including growing recognition of older persons' dignity and fundamental rights and freedoms as well as their potential to contribute to society.

Thank you for your attention.