



**Opening statement
by**

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Executive Secretary
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at

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Your Excellency Minister Vieira da Silva, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, colleagues,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you today to this high-level segment of our Ministerial Conference.

I would like to echo the message from the United Nations Secretary General - this Conference shows the importance that governments in this region attach to properly addressing ageing populations.

After the debates of experts yesterday, we are now looking forward to ministerial round tables. I trust these discussions will demonstrate a strong political will to recognize the potential that longevity holds for individuals, economies and societies.

(Broad base of stakeholders)

In 2002, it was the governments who committed to implementing the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and then reaffirmed this commitment with the Berlin, León and Vienna ministerial declarations.

However, as the Vienna Declaration emphasises:

... policies on ageing and their implementation are to be seen as a shared responsibility of all major actors in society...

It is crucial that many stakeholders contribute to a sustainable society for all ages. In this spirit, UNECE has been supporting the involvement of NGOs and the research community throughout the inter-governmental process of follow-up to the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action.

Both the NGOs and the research community held their respective forums here in Lisbon on Wednesday. Today, we will hear their conclusions. Moreover, in less than an hour, we will have a panel discussion between ministers and civil society representatives.

(Broad theme)

Today's ministerial round-tables will focus on realizing the potential of living longer. Policies that unleash the potential of older people, promote their active involvement, and ensure ageing with dignity touch on different aspects. Among them, for example, combating ageism in the labour market, or supporting innovative, person-centred solutions for providing care.

We must reconcile competing priorities from different fields if we want our ageing-related policies to be effective. A cross-sectoral view is necessary, when policies from various fields are discussed and we seek to understand their interlinkages. The UNECE Regional Implementation Strategy for the Madrid Plan of Action provides the framework for taking such a broad, comprehensive view.

(United Nations and its regional commissions: the necessary platform)

We believe that the United Nations can help tackle complex universal issues such as population ageing. Within the UN system, UNECE and its sister regional commissions lead the discussion on ageing-related policies, and provide platforms for exchanging experience.

At UNECE, this is carried out by the intergovernmental Working Group on Ageing, established after the 2007 León Ministerial Conference. It gives me great pleasure to see the strong involvement of national experts in this Working Group. The Group's activities help policymakers translate the broad policy framework into specific actions – actions that make a difference in the quality of life of your citizens.

Such international work relies on partnership and mutual support. We hope this spirit will grow even stronger thanks to this Conference. UNECE is grateful to the European Commission, the United Nations Population Fund, World Health Organization, the International Labor Organization and the European Centre for Social Policy and Research for continuing constructive cooperation. I would like to express my deep gratitude to the Government of Portugal for hosting this Conference and for the warm hospitality here in Lisbon.

(Conclusion)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to assure you that UNECE stands ready to continue supporting you in implementing the Madrid Plan of Action.

Finally, I encourage all of us to seize the opportunity that the Conference provides for discussing the different facets of ageing, and for identifying appropriate policy responses.

Thank you for your attention.