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on behalf of
the accredited non-governmental organizations

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Topic: Participation of older people – Human rights

Excellencies:

We feel that we have a big responsibility and a great honour assuming the task of addressing you a few words on the topic "Participation and Rights of Older Persons" on behalf of the NGO's working in the region in these issues.

As it was stated in the World NGO Forum on Ageing parallel to the II UN World Assembly on Ageing Human Rights are the pillars to build a society for all ages.

Discrimination based on age is suffered by several older people in many developed countries and countries with economies in transition in multiple circumstances: severe economic difficulties, limitations on' access to health services, lack of social services, considerable shortcomings in housing and living conditions, exclusion from culture and education, inappropriate treatment, scant participation in social and political life.

We, as NGOs are calling for the full and strict application of the Declaration of Human Rights, recalling that it must be enforced for all citizens, regardless of age, The full inclusion of older people in the social and economic life of their respective societies, the putting to use of their capacity and experience and the defence of their rights against any form of discrimination constitute an essential aspiration of the NGO Community.

It is important to mention that the Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing 2002 underlies the right to development as essential for the creation of an inclusive society for all ages.

The rights forming the basic pillars of Social Protection are, among others: the right to a retirement with sufficient income to ensure security and dignity in their remaining life; access to health and social care services ensuring their personal independence and quality of life, and social inclusion.

In addition to being a universal right, and as it is stated in the Strategy, retirement should be promoted as a situation that can be reached voluntarily in a flexible and gradual manner.

The EU comments to the draft of the Strategy reflect that "There are some commitments and actions of the Madrid International Plan of Action, in particular regarding issues related to the labour market, social and health care, enabling and supportive environments, and human rights which are not adequately reflected in the strategy".

Health protection must be seen as a fundamental right of the older persons and acknowledged as such in the constitutions and legislations of all countries, avoiding any age-related discrimination. The principle of active ageing must preside health policies in all spheres: local, national and international.

Elderly women must be given special protection in order to defend their rights. We want to make a recognition on how the gender dimension is reflected in the Strategy.

Although some progresses have been done, there are still older people in post-conflict and transitional societies feeling isolated, displaced, unable to meet their basic needs and without access to entitlements such as pensions and welfare services. Older people have strong difficulties in developing new forms of work.

There is a big concern regarding the Street elderly, a common phenomenon in most large cities.

Generally speaking most vulnerable and deprived older people in the ECE Region are generally badly informed about their rights. This means that many do not receive their full entitlement to benefits. It is important to improve the general level of legal literacy by better information and by better understandable legal texts.

To ensure full integration and participation of older persons in society is one of the prior Commitments of the Strategy in the view of the NGO Community. That's why we consider that the RIS should emphasize the role of the elderly and the involvement of their representative organisations in the process of implementation of the Plan.

In many countries ethnic minorities suffer especially the breach of their fundamental rights. This situation is particularly serious among the oldest populations profoundly rooted in their cultural traditions and with greater difficulties to integrate into mainstream cultures.

Migrants, in general, and older migrants, in particular, face unique social, economic and legal problems as they are even more vulnerable to serious dilemmas of their own. They are usually the victims of "ageism" and other kinds of discrimination (racial, ethnic, gender and handicap status). The Strategy mentions the need of design and implementation of integration programmes and measures addressed to guarantee economic and health security. It is also important to consider measures to avoid discrimination. Countries should establish practice standards to govern public and private policies on ageing migrants.

Mechanisms which create enabling environments for older persons have to address all areas of life. Older persons basically need nutrition, housing and safety just as persons of any age do, they could, however, live more independent and active lives with the provision of specific modifications. The main point would be that modifications are made available and be accepted. All measures could ensure the continuity and improvement of the scope of competences of persons in advanced age and facilitate a fuller participation in social and cultural activities. Adaptation of the immediate environment, like all preventive measures, has to start earlier in life than the urgent need for them arises.

The creation of the positions of Ombudsman for the Elderly should be fostered as should Councilors for the Elderly at all municipalities or local authorities.

Issues related to mistreatment and abuses against older persons are not reflected in the draft of the Strategy .There is often no recognition of or no real respect for the right to protection in situations of abuse, violence and ill-treatment in local, national and international spheres, as well as for the protection of persons residing in institutions. There has been insufficient progress in the development of Human Rights with regard to persons suffering from dementia. The need of guaranteeing adequate care for dependant older persons and their dignity is reflected in the Strategy. But older persons need, also legal protection against abuses and mistreatment. We are looking forward that this protection will be reflected in the laws.

Declaring our commitment of working towards the full respect of the Rights of the older persons, we ask your help to support our task. We want to thank you very much for your attention.