

Official Address by Mr. Werner Haug
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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Let me first thank the organizers for the opportunity to briefly address the Ministerial Conference on Ageing 2012. It is gratifying to see that the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPA) and its regional implementation strategy succeeded in initiating a regular monitoring process of commitments in addressing ageing – one of the most dramatic societal changes affecting all countries and regions of the world. And it is also reassuring to see the United Nations bringing together governments, civil society and academia not only to debate and exchange experiences, but to commit to a policy framework on ageing based on evidence and grounded in human rights.

This is all the more notable as there is no specialized UN agency working on ageing or with older persons. This Conference takes place thanks to the engagement of member states, civil society and – above all – the engagement of a host country such as Austria with its strategic support, gracious hospitality and commitment to the cause.

UNFPA, the United Nations Population fund, is probably the one UN agency which has most consistently supported the UN member states in addressing ageing from a policy and a programmatic perspective since the 1990s. UNFPA considers ageing as an intrinsic dimension of development with both individual and societal dimensions. Our mandate is rooted in the holistic approach of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development which took place in Cairo, Egypt, in 1994 and is approaching its 20th anniversary. The Programme of Action of the ICPD formed a bridge between the 1982 first World Assembly on Ageing, held here in Vienna, and the 2002 Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing.

In 1994 ageing was still considered to be an emerging issue which was mainly of concern only for Western Europe, Japan and to a certain degree North America. Today it is high on the political agenda of all ECE member states, almost all Latin American countries, East and Southeast Asia (from China to Thailand and Malaysia), and also countries in the Middle East and North Africa which have witnessed both rapid declines in fertility and increasing longevity.

On 1st October 2012, the International Day of Older Persons, UNFPA together with our co-author and trusted NGO partner – Help Age International, will launch the Global report entitled *Ageing in the 21st Century: A Celebration and a Challenge*. The report addresses ageing as a global challenge, as it is forecasted that in 2050 almost 80% of older persons worldwide will live in today's emerging economies and developing countries.

But let me briefly return to Europe. Many speakers in the expert panels reminded us yesterday that the ECE region is extremely diverse and that we have to pay attention to the very different economic, institutional and social contexts of our countries. The region includes global leaders promoting both “active ageing” and the shaping of age and gender inclusive societies. The region also includes some countries where the ageing process is only just now taking off and countries where life expectancy (in particular for males) is still on a par with developing countries. In addition, internal disparities in life expectancy often remain unacceptably high between population groups, sub-regions and within urban and rural contexts. We have to pay serious attention to these divides and their determinants.

UNFPA as a development agency in the ECE region is focusing on countries with special needs and development gaps in Eastern Europe, South-Eastern Europe and Central Asia. These countries face a number of specific challenges in creating an enabling environment for active ageing and an inclusive society for all ages and gender. Let me just mention four challenges:

- 1) *Lack of statistical data.* For most countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia the indicators on ageing cannot be calculated because reliable data are missing (see the blanks in the ECE monitoring report which was prepared for this Conference). This means that the evidence base on the situation of older persons, and for informed policy decisions on active ageing, is weak or missing.
- 2) *The importance of the informal sector.* In many EECA countries the economy includes a significant informal sector and in some its size is growing. This affects the tax returns and the contributions for pension schemes, unemployment benefits and health insurance and puts old and young at risk. In many countries access to quality health care is available only with big out-of-pocket expenditures which many cannot afford.
- 3) *Gender disparities.* The big differences in life expectancy between males and females mean that ageing has a strong gender bias and that living in older age is, to a large degree, a female reality. From surveys we know that poverty in old age particularly affects women who are also frequent victims of violence and abuse.
- 4) *Importance of international migration.* Outmigration impacts strongly on the intergenerational relations in many communities, disrupts social networks and puts additional burdens on older people, in particular women who are obliged to take care of family members who stay behind, oftentimes the children.

UNFPA is committed to strengthen its support to governments and civil society organizations in the region in the development of human rights based policy frameworks to address ageing, foster active ageing and older people friendly communities and services.

We do not see this as a contradiction to our call and commitment for increased investments in young people, rather as the perfect fit, as older persons support the young generations in many ways and because the young of today are the old of tomorrow!