

Closing remarks by Mr Sven Alkalaj
United Nations Under-Secretary-General
Executive Secretary of the United Nations
Economic Commission for Europe
at the
UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing
Vienna, 20 September 2012

Your Excellencies, distinguished delegates, colleagues, (and friends,)

I am greatly honoured to address the Conference at closing plenary session on the occasion of the adoption of the Vienna Ministerial Declaration “Ensuring a society for all ages: promoting quality of life and active ageing”.

The consensus enshrined in this Declaration provides a firm foundation for promoting quality of life and active ageing and guide us towards a society for all ages. We have affirmed fundamental principles, reinforced essential commitments, and sharpened our focus.

Long-term view

Many of you in the room have been part of this historical movement shaping the international policy framework on ageing, dedicating to it many years of your own professional lives. This Conference is another milestone in bringing the issue of aging to maturity.

I want to commend you on dedication and commitment by adopting this declaration, you, representatives of the member States of the UNECE, have lived up to your historic responsibility. You have shown that you have a good understanding of the real challenges involved and that it takes a lot of determination to turn the tide.

During the Conference, I have seen that the topic is in the hands of responsible leaders. I trust you will set the course and make a difference for the lives of our countries’ citizens. Some of the steps to be taken may be painful. There may be restraints. But when we meet again in 5 years I count on all of you that there will be things to report on, that all together we will have made yet another big step ahead.

Importance of follow up

The Declaration embraces the multitude of specific issues that we have debated through the two conference days. Built around four main policy goals, the Declaration will guide our actions when we go back home and are faced with the challenges of addressing the needs and releasing the potential of people of different ages. The NGO forum was an illustration of the energies of older persons. Similarly are the debates at the Open-ended Working Group in New York that works towards strengthening the protection of the human rights of elderly persons. Doing our utmost to implement the commitments of the Vienna Declaration is in our own interest and in that of our children as well.

I have noted with satisfaction that ageing has become a topic of much research interest. I have heard important and remarkable research presentations. I am convinced that if the dialogue between policy-makers and scientists is managed well there is considerable room for cross-fertilization.

I was also pleased to see the many young people in the room throughout the Conference. We have lived up to our own call for interaction between all generations. I am confident that the networks that were formed and strengthened will live on and carry forward the implementation of our Declaration.

UNECE role

I would like to reassure you that the UNECE secretariat remains committed to assist you in your follow-up actions. I am glad that you have reaffirmed in the Declaration the commitment to the UNECE Working Group on Ageing and the appreciation of the work of the secretariat.

Many of the activities that we have organized in the past and plan to do in the future, rely on additional financial contributions from member States. The contributions from a number of countries have greatly strengthened and broadened the range of activities that the Working Group can pursue. I am glad that you have reaffirmed in the Declaration to continue such support to the extent possible.

We will surely continue to support the international exchanges of policymakers and maintain links to non-governmental organizations, researchers as well as statisticians. In fact, one of the new initiatives of our statistical programme aims at improving the contribution of statistical agencies to informing ageing-related policymaking. We are also committed to continue capacity-building for designing and developing ageing-related policies and programmes.

The UNECE Population Unit will continue working with your offices.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Now that we are approaching the end of two days of intensive work and the closing of the Conference, allow me to express my gratitude to all the government delegations, to the representatives of the civil society and the scientific community for their contributions.

I want once again to express our thanks to the Austrian Federal Ministry for Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection for hosting and organizing the Conference together with us. I would also like to thank the City of Vienna, the local organizers, interpreters, colleagues from the United Nations Office at Vienna, as well as my colleagues from the UNECE secretariat, for excellent job and making this Conference a success wishing you all safe trip back to your countries.

Let the spirit of partnership and commitment at the Vienna Ministerial Conference remain with us all.

Thank you.