

Statement 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, 19 September 2012

Mr Minister, your Excellences, distinguished delegates, colleagues,

I welcome you all,

- representatives of the Member States,
- experts of the scientific community and members of civil society,
- as well as colleagues from international organisations

to this Ministerial Conference on Ageing in Vienna under the motto “Ensuring a Society for all Ages: Promoting Quality of Life and Active Ageing”.

Ageing —the issue and international response (Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing)

The UNECE region is undergoing a serious demographic change – our population is ageing as fewer children are born and as we live longer. While longer and healthier lives are among the greatest achievements of modern times, they also present challenges for us as individuals and as a society as a whole.

Realisation that this demographic change has important and far-reaching implications across all spheres of our society is not new. But it is more acute today than ever before. There was probably not one week this year that the world press would not report on expert or business community debates, civil society initiatives, programmes at country or international levels that address the consequences of population ageing.

Our Member States were among the most active parties in developing a global framework to respond to it. This was done thirty years ago at the first World Summit on Ageing here in Vienna – (as Minister Hundstorfer just mentioned) - and later, in 2002, in Madrid and Berlin, where the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and its Regional Implementation Strategy were adopted.

The **Madrid Plan** is as pertinent today as ten years ago. It **calls for a paradigm shift away** from old age being associated with dependency and vulnerability of older persons or them being a burden to society. It **calls for actions** that positively embrace the opportunities that come with ageing and allow to benefit more from older people’s skills and resources.

Our Member States have all individually expressed their support for this plan. Its implementation remains a paramount mission to the entire region that we can achieve through a joint commitment. To **ensure a society for all ages**, we must recognise the potential and valuable contribution of older people and safeguard their rights in all spheres – be they social, political, economic or health-related.

Review and Appraisal of MIPAA/RIS implementation, role of Working Group on Ageing

Today, we gathered here to review what was achieved over the last five years in implementing the commitments of the Regional Strategy for the Madrid Plan; to discuss new and innovative policy responses and share good practices that would help us to seize the opportunities and respond to challenges that ageing is posing in our region .

Let me remind you that the first systematic review and appraisal of the Madrid Plan implementation was carried out in 2007 and culminated in the Ministerial Conference in León, Spain. The decisions taken at the León Conference paved the way for establishment of the UNECE Working Group on Ageing. The Group, since 2008, provides a unique intergovernmental platform to actively manage **knowledge on and exchange of** effective policies and good practices in the implementation of the Regional Strategy. In that it embodies the Member States commitment “To promote the implementation and follow-up of the regional implementation strategy **through regional cooperation**”.

To this end, the Working Group initiated a series of UNECE ‘Policy Briefs on Ageing’. The policy briefs highlight strategies for policymakers and offer good practice examples for a variety of policy contexts found in our region. The briefs are highly valued by stakeholders. To make them more accessible, a number of Member States translated them into their national languages. In fact, the latest one, dedicated to Active Ageing, was prepared in the run up to the Conference and is already translated into German and French.

The UNECE Secretariat, which stands behind the work programme of the Working Group, has also been very engaged over the past years to assist mainstreaming ageing efforts within our countries. For example, the UNECE was invited by the government of Armenia to develop a Road Map on how to enhance implementation of the Madrid framework in the country, based on an evaluation of country’s specific situation. The UNECE went to Armenia with a team of experts, met with key stakeholders from different ministries, civil society, the private sector, the media and academia. The recommendations that my organization developed within this Road Map provided important inputs for the finalization of a national ageing strategy that was accompanied by a corresponding action plan. Both the Strategy and the Action Plan were adopted as a government decree in August this year. A similar exercise was done in the Republic of Moldova.

These are just a few examples of how the UNECE and its Member States are putting resources into promoting and securing active ageing and societal participation of older persons. By comparing national and regional responses to an ageing society, like the ones just mentioned, we have the possibility of engaging in a dialogue and in sharing ideas. Cross-national learning and good practice sharing is vital for the success of the regional

implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action and clearly demonstrates the great value of the platform of international cooperation that the UNECE delivers.

I hope this conference will be a forum to gain the insight and exchange ideas on cross-national policy responses to an ageing society whilst also recognising the different needs and aspirations of our various member states. I would like to stress that ageing is a common challenge, and a common challenge requires a common response.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Austria and its Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection for hosting this Conference. I would also like to thank all our other partners who share our commitment in working towards a more equitable society for all ages, including the Commission of the European Union, UNFPA, WHO Regional Office for Europe, the European Centre for Social Policy and Research, the International Institute on Ageing and the Working Group on Ageing.

I wish you all a fruitful and engaging debate during these two days.