

**United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) 4<sup>th</sup> Ministerial  
Conference on Ageing**

**Second Ministerial Roundtable – “Ensuring Ageing with Dignity”**

**Friday 22 September 2017 @ 3pm**

Good afternoon.

I would like to start by thanking the organisers and our hosts for the invitation to introduce and chair this Ministerial roundtable discussion on the very important theme of “Ensuring Ageing with Dignity”. I would like to thank our rapporteur Mr. Giovanni Lamura from the National Institute of Health and Science on Ageing in Italy. The benefits of sharing international experiences at these discussions are immense. As we say in the Irish language, “*ní neart go cur le chéile*” – meaning that we have no strength without cooperation.

Dignity is at the heart of what it means to be a human being. We all have a right to be valued and respected, and have a duty to treat others the same way.

*AGEING POPULATION*

As we are all aware it is one of the great success stories of our age that so many more people are living for so much longer. The successes achieved in recent decades by so many countries in improving health and extending life expectancy should be acknowledged and celebrated.

The quality of our lives as we age has vastly improved. We are enjoying full and busy lives for longer than our parents or grandparents could ever have contemplated.

For several decades now, there has been a worldwide Positive Ageing movement that reminds us that the later years can be a time of new beginnings and of new possibilities.

While an ageing population brings some challenges I feel strongly that this also presents us with opportunities to bring about improvements in society to facilitate and accommodate our changing needs.

Ensuring dignity in ageing is essential. We, as members of Governments with responsibility for policy and decision-making must foster the development of environments that allow people to live well and enjoy their communities. We must also ensure that people are protected when they are vulnerable, and have access to supports and services when they need them.

The Ministerial Declaration adopted at the conference yesterday and the work being carried out across the ECE region under the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing helps us as an international community to focus on creating an inclusive and equitable society for citizens of all ages and abilities. In working to achieve a good quality of life for our ageing population, we must also be aware of maximising independence, self-determination and

participation in society, while protecting older persons' enjoyment of human rights and dignity. In this context, I am particularly pleased that the Declaration includes an aspiration to facilitate where possible the preferences of older couples who need care and who wish to be cared for together.

As a Minister for Older People I am very aware of the importance of planning for positive ageing. In my own country in 2013 we published the *Healthy Ireland* framework, which sets out a vision to improve the health and wellbeing of the entire population of Ireland. Its main focus is on keeping people healthier for longer. At the same time, the *National Positive Ageing Strategy* was developed to signpost what we can do to make Ireland a good country in which to grow older.

In the past, our policy in Ireland relating to older people tended to be too focused on health and social care issues. Our Positive Ageing Strategy highlights that a whole-of-Government response is required to address a range of social, economic and environmental factors that affect the health and wellbeing of our ageing citizens.

The Strategy sets out high level Goals on themes of participation, health, security and research. It includes a strong focus on enabling people to age with confidence, security and dignity in their own homes and communities for as long as possible. Actions are identified for Government in areas such as improving living standards, safe and secure homes, developing age-friendly public spaces, and protections from elder abuse.

As a Government we have recently re-committed to the core principles of the Strategy. We held the first National Positive Ageing Stakeholder Forum in March this year, giving organisations who represent the needs and views of older people in this area the opportunity to work together to identify key priorities to propose to Government. The Forum facilitates constructive dialogue between the decision makers and the representatives of older people.

A Healthy and Positive Ageing Initiative has also been established to implement the research objective of the Strategy. A first National Positive Ageing Indicators Report was published last year and it highlights many of the positive and negative aspects of growing old in Ireland and provides us with an important evidence resource to monitor the issues that matter in the lives of older people over time.

I know several other countries have also developed comprehensive strategies at national level to foster active ageing and enhance wellbeing of older persons. At local level, a number of countries promote the development of enabling environments through age-friendly community initiatives, following the age-friendly city concept developed by the World Health Organization. Simple changes such as providing designated parking spaces for older people, making public buildings more accessible and providing seating in public areas, go a long way towards achieving the kind of inclusive society we are all striving for.

## COMMUNITY SERVICES

As we age we all aspire to live at home in our own community. In keeping with the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and the Ministerial Declaration our Government policy in Ireland is to support older people to live in dignity and independence in their own homes and communities for as long as possible.

My Department is developing detailed plans to further enhance our home care services. A public consultation process is under way to ensure the views of older people themselves, their families, healthcare workers and all the relevant stakeholders are clearly heard.

While we support older people to live at home as long as possible we have a national scheme of financial support for all those assessed as requiring long term residential care. The *Nursing Homes Support Scheme*, also known as *A Fair Deal* is a means-tested scheme of financial assistance for those who need long term nursing home care.

The Scheme is designed to ensure that long-term nursing home care is accessible and affordable for everyone, and that personal preference is respected, where possible, when it comes to choosing an approved nursing home. Since the introduction of the Fair Deal Scheme the average length of stay for people in long term nursing home care has fallen dramatically from approximately 7 years to 2.2 years. This is a clear signal that our citizens enjoy

greater opportunities to remain at home and in their communities for longer, which of course would be their wish.

### *DEMENTIA*

In Ireland, we estimate that around two-thirds of nursing home residents have a dementia. We also estimate that two-thirds of people with dementia live in their own homes and communities. In 2014 Ireland's first *National Dementia Strategy* was published and a National Dementia Office has been established to implement it. The aim of the Strategy is to improve care services so that the increasing numbers of people with dementia can live well for as long as possible, can ultimately die with comfort and dignity, and can have services and supports delivered in the best way possible.

### *PALLIATIVE CARE*

With so many more people living much longer worldwide, there are increased numbers of people living with, and dying from, chronic diseases and life-limiting illness. We want to ensure that all people will be provided with the type of palliative care services that they need regardless of what diagnosis they have, how old they are or whether they die in a hospice, an acute hospital, a nursing home or at home. In recent years in Ireland we have invested considerably in hospice and community palliative care services. We are also working to improve the quality of service delivery, and to ensure that all professionals who come into contact with palliative patients and their families have the skills they need to provide excellent, compassionate care.

## *CONCLUSION*

As an international community we are challenging the stereotypes which older people can face through ensuring:

- that everyone, young and old, is a valued member of society,
- that older people are enabled to participate fully in the activities of their communities,
- that we foster a positive attitude towards our older family members and friends, and, importantly,
- that older people have a positive attitude towards themselves.

And we must pay particular attention to the needs of more marginalized, vulnerable, hard-to-reach and minority groups of older people.

With these in mind we can fulfil the commitments of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing to promote positive ageing and ensure ageing with dignity.

I would like to finish by acknowledging the very hard work that went into organising this conference and I look forward to our discussion.

We will now have opening interventions on the key issues from four Heads of Delegation. Each speaker will have will have 7 minutes to present an initial statement.

After these statements have been delivered an interactive discussion will take place, when each speaker will have 3-4 minutes to address pertinent issues and suggest some possible solutions or ideas on how to ensure that people can preserve their dignity in later life irrespective of their physical, emotional and mental capacities.

It is my pleasure to now invite initial presentations from the following Heads of Delegation:

- **Mr. Artem Asatryan**, Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Armenia;
- **Mrs. Céline Fremault**, Minister of the Government of the Brussels-Capital Region – responsible for Housing, Quality of Life, Environment and Energy;
- **Mrs. Olga Krentovska**, First Deputy of the Minister of Social Policy, Ukraine; and
- **His Excellency Mr. Andreas Ignatiou**, Ambassador of Cyprus in Lisbon – on behalf of Mrs. Zeta Emilianidou, Minister of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance, Cyprus.

