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Opening remarks (Voice VDO)
Fourth Asia-Pacific Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing
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Venue: ESCAP Hall

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

I extend a warm welcome to the Fourth Asia-Pacific Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, or MIPAA.

I wish to thank the members and associate members of the Commission, the intergovernmental organizations, UN partners, stakeholders and older persons for joining this meeting as we also mark the 20th anniversary of MIPAA.

I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation to the Asia-Pacific Informal Regional Network of Focal Points on Ageing for supporting the organization of this review and appraisal.

Over the last two years, all of our lives have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, older persons in particular. This has brought more attention to the growing number and share of older persons in Asia and the Pacific.

The reality is that older persons contribute to our economies and societies across the region. They make contributions to every sector.

- They produce food in rural areas, and cook and sell it as street vendors in urban areas;
- Older persons drive public transportation, including taxis, tuk-tuks and buses;
- They lead some of the most successful companies in our region; and
- They form an integral and much-loved part of our families.

If we put this in numbers, there are now 630 million people age 60 years or over in the Asia-Pacific region, representing 14 per cent of the total population. By 2050, their number is projected to increase to 1.3 billion, or one quarter of the population.

The majority of older persons are women, with up to 61 per cent in the age group of 80 years or over comprised of women.

People are living longer than ever before. Healthy older persons are able to participate in the labour force, and they often want to continue in their jobs and contribute longer to the society.

However, in many countries, older persons, especially older women, do not have income security and often have to work in the informal sector.

Many have inadequate access to healthcare and pensions, making them highly vulnerable.

Older women are the main providers of long-term care in the household. They also look after their grandchildren. They perform this work without any pay and rarely receive any specialized training. Older women are one of the largest contributors of unpaid care work in the region.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

We must broaden the view of older persons by recognizing them as agents of development. With many parts of the Asia-Pacific region rapidly ageing, we must take concrete steps to provide environments in which our elders live safely, securely and in dignity and contribute to societies.

First, we must continue to invest in social protection and access to universal healthcare throughout the life-course. Financial security is needed so that older persons can stay active and healthy for longer periods.

Second, older persons should have lifelong learning opportunities. Enhanced digital literacy, for example, can close the grey digital divide.

Third, addressing age-based discrimination and barriers will be crucial to allowing the full participation of older persons in economies and societies. Ageism intersects and exacerbates other disadvantages. Combatting these disadvantages will contribute to better health and well-being of all.

Finally, we must invest in quality long-term care systems to ensure that older persons can receive affordable quality care. We must integrate long term care and mental care with health care services. We will not be able to continue to rely on unpaid care in the future.

Distinguished participants,

Adopted in 2002, the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing already provides a comprehensive action plan complementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It also complements the United Nations Decade on Healthy Ageing.

Over the next three days, we will hear about progress and gaps in its implementation.

We will also learn about good practices and future priorities.

We must reflect on how to address future challenges, such as pandemics, as well as climate change and issues that may emerge.

And we hope that at the end of this meeting, member States will adopt an outcome document that reflects consensus in the region to accelerate the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action in Asia and the Pacific.

I thank you.