Statement of Older Persons Constituency, Asia Pacific Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism, Presented by A. Sankar, Executive Director, Empower India.

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Statement:

Madam Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen. Very good afternoon to you all. This is Arumugam Sankar, Executive Director, from Empower India representing the Older People constituency of Asia Pacific Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism.

Older persons believe that sustainable development goals can be achieved when issues affecting them are recognized and responded to. The population of older persons (aged over 60) in the region will triple between 2010 and 2050, reaching close to 1.3 billion people. The number of older persons in the Asia-Pacific region is rising at an unprecedented rate and it is at the forefront of the global phenomenon of population ageing. Aside from the increasing number of older person population, they are also confronted with different issues such as but not limited to poverty in old age, poor health and lack of access to health care, lack of employment/work opportunities, lack of decent and living pensions, migration of traditional caregivers, and older persons became subject of abuse and violence.

The pandemic crisis that we are facing today greatly affects the older persons, they are the most affected population to COVID-19 because of their susceptibility to the virus and being at higher risk for severe disease and death. Their vulnerability stems not only from the consequences of an ageing body but also because of their generally poor economic and health well-being, a condition even before the pandemic. COVID-19 puts the rights of older persons face potential significant protection risks. Some of the issues confronting older persons across the Asia-Pacific region in this pandemic are; health care denied for conditions unrelated to COVID-19, neglect and abuse in institutions and care facilities, an increase in poverty and unemployment, the dramatic impact on well being and health, and the trauma of stigma and discrimination. Lack of universal social protection policies and programs puts older persons in a more challenging situation. Failure to consider and address these issues will result in a more serious problem like exclusion and discrimination and without specific and inclusive measures for older persons, we are slowly putting their lives on the edge.

Older persons appreciate the efforts and precautionary measures that the government is doing in ensuring their safety against COVID-19; e.g. they are not allowed to go out from their houses. These efforts should consider the multiple roles they have in society; as caregivers, volunteers, community leaders, etc. We must see the full diversity of people within the older person population. Older women, for instance, are over-represented among paid and unpaid
care workers. We must also recognize the important contribution of older persons to the crisis response, including as health workers and caregivers.

To enable and accelerate transformation, we need to acknowledge the problems confronting the older population that are obstacles in achieving SDGs; ageism, invisibility in mainstream statistics, and lack of strong institutional monitoring system for older persons’ welfare.

Ageing is both an opportunity and a challenge. To leave no older persons furthest behind, we recommend the following:

1. Recognize that population ageing is a success, not a burden. Older persons and those with disabilities are also vibrant and productive members of society. Therefore, population ageing should be considered a megatrend and age as one of the cross-cutting issues that must be taken into account across all goals and targets;

2. For the development of a regional indicator framework that includes measurement into older age as a central priority to future-proof the regional statistical framework and provide the global leadership needed on ageing statistics;

3. Alongside other marginalized groups, older persons must be included in the formal implementation processes of the framework, through their systematic engagement in consultation, information and participation in the mechanisms for planning, monitoring, review, and reporting; and

4. Approval of the proposed UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons. Unlike other sectors which have their own policy-making and monitoring body, older person has none. This institutional limitation affects the implementation of a variety of programs and services and/or its alignment with sectoral plans and policies because there is no central leadership.

Thanks and very kind of you all.

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