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**EMERGING ISSUES AND DEVELOPMENTS AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL:  
SOCIO-ECONOMIC MEASURES TO ALLEVIATE POVERTY  
IN RURAL AND URBAN AREAS**

(Item 6 (c) of the provisional agenda)

**REPORT ON THE REGIONAL MEETING ON A PLAN OF ACTION  
ON AGEING FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC, MACAU,  
28 SEPTEMBER TO 1 OCTOBER 1998**

## SUMMARY

The Regional Meeting on a Plan of Action on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific was convened by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific at Macau from 28 September to 1 October 1998. Attended by over 45 representatives and observers representing governments as well as non-governmental and other organizations, the Meeting adopted the Macau Declaration and Plan of Action on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific.

The Macau Declaration on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific expresses appreciation of the contribution that older persons are making and could continue to make to their societies and reaffirms the need for a variety of policy responses to the emerging issues associated with the rapid population ageing process taking place in the region. Annexed to the Macau Declaration is the Plan of Action on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific. The Declaration calls on the Commission to endorse the Macau Plan of Action at its fifty-fifth session in 1999, which is the International Year of Older Persons, and to provide support for its successful implementation. National governments are called upon to establish and strengthen their national policy on ageing for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Plan of Action.

The Macau Plan of Action addresses seven major areas of concern relating to ageing and older persons in the Asian and Pacific region: (a) the social position of older persons; (b) older persons and the family; (c) health and nutrition; (d) housing, transportation and the built environment; (e) older persons and the market; (f) income security, maintenance and employment; and (g) social services and the community. Specific action is recommended for each of the seven major areas of concern. The Plan of Action identifies the immediate tasks for Asia and the Pacific focusing on four major areas: understanding of the issues and implications of population ageing on society; the preparation of the population for an ageing process that is productive and fulfilling; the development of a service infrastructure and environment based on traditional and modern institutions that will be able to meet present and future needs; and the delivery of essential services needed by the growing number of older persons.

The Macau Plan of Action also addresses the structures and processes of its implementation. These include national infrastructure for ageing and older persons; planning and targeting; intersectoral collaboration and support; coordination and monitoring; and resource mobilization and allocation. These are considered key components of a national service infrastructure which enhances, safeguards and preserves the well-being of older persons and promotes their participation in society.

Regional and international cooperation, particularly regional support measures are important elements in the implementation of the Macau Plan of Action. ESCAP, as the regional arm of the United Nations for Asia and the Pacific, is considered the leading agency in providing technical support for the implementation and monitoring of the Plan of Action. The ESCAP secretariat has been called upon to review the progress in this implementation process and to report its findings and recommendations for further action to the Commission at its annual session in 2001 and every five years thereafter.

## **I. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING**

1. The Regional Meeting on a Plan of Action on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific was convened by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) at Macau from 28 September to 1 October 1998. The Meeting was hosted by the Government of Macau through the Macau Social Welfare Department.
2. The main purpose of the Meeting was to consider and adopt a plan of action on ageing for Asia and the Pacific which would serve as a guide and a framework to governments in the region in formulating or strengthening national policies and programmes which aimed to improve the quality of life of older persons and to integrate them into mainstream development. It would also provide a reference for development planners and policy-makers in the concerned sectors in setting attainable, time-bound targets and goals concerning ageing and older persons.
3. The Meeting was attended by representatives of the following members and associate members: China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Macau, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam.
4. Representatives of the following non-governmental organizations and other organizations attended as observers: Caritas of Macau, General Union of Labour Associations of Macau, General Union of Neighbourhood Associations of Macau, HelpAge International, Holy House of Mercy of Macau, Hong Kong Charity Association, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, International Federation on Ageing, Japan Ageing Research Center and the Saint Anthony Parish Elderly Center.

## **II. OPENING OF THE MEETING**

### **A. Opening statements**

5. In opening the Meeting, the Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCAP welcomed the participants and drew attention to the fact that populations were ageing rapidly across the Asian and Pacific region. She pointed out that the Meeting offered a most timely opportunity to reflect upon past achievements and the current situation concerning ageing and older persons, as well as to foresee and plan for the future with an open and broad perspective.
6. The ESCAP region was facing a myriad issues which had given rise to a host of shared concerns for the well-being of older persons and their role in society, particularly relating to health care, employment, social security, the family and community support system and other related issues. The situation, exacerbated by the current economic crisis in the region, would have a serious impact on older persons, especially the destitute, including women in the old-old category who were living alone.
7. ESCAP resolution 54/5 of 22 April 1998, entitled "International Year of Older Persons: towards a society for all ages" had urged the formulation of a plan of action on ageing for Asia and the Pacific.

The Meeting was building on the results of the Regional Workshop on Preparations for the International Year of Older Persons, held at Beijing from 26 to 29 May 1998, which had contributed information on and analysis of the regional situation and the prospects on ageing and older persons and had amalgamated the views of representatives of governments, non-governmental organizations and other concerned organizations. Noting the numerous initiatives undertaken in many countries in dealing with issues related to ageing, the Deputy Executive Secretary urged all concerned to work together to make preparations for the International Year of Older Persons and to put their efforts into drafting and implementing the plan of action on ageing for Asia and the Pacific.

8. In closing, the Deputy Executive Secretary expressed, on behalf of ESCAP, heartfelt thanks and gratitude to the Government of Macau, through the Social Welfare Department, for its generous support towards the organization of the Meeting.

9. The Meeting was inaugurated by Alarcão Troni, Secretary for Social Affairs and Budgeting of the Government of Macau. In his address, the Secretary noted that, following the Copenhagen Summit on Social Development in 1995, increasing attention had been paid to social development issues such as poverty alleviation, human resources development, and the participation of civil society in the development process and ageing. The rapid ageing of populations in Asia and the Pacific would pose serious challenges and older persons would remain among the disadvantaged and vulnerable groups of society.

10. Countries of the region needed to prepare themselves for those challenges. Governments, non-governmental organizations and other concerned parties should join efforts in addressing critical issues related to ageing and older persons and the Secretary called for new and innovative programmes in that regard.

11. The Plan of Action on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific should address the diversity of conditions of the countries of the region and provide guidance to countries in their national endeavours to face the challenges posed by the implications of population ageing.

#### **B. Election of officers**

12. The Meeting elected the following members of the bureau:

Chairperson:	Gloria S. Mallare
	Assistant Secretary
	Department of Social Welfare and Development
	Philippines

Vice-Chairpersons: Nimala Pathirana  
Director  
Department of Social Services  
Ministry of Social Services  
Sri Lanka

Wu Cang Ping  
Director of the Expert Group  
China National Committee on Ageing  
China

Rapporteur: Ashok Pal Singh  
Deputy Secretary  
Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment  
India

### **III. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA**

13. The Meeting adopted the following agenda:
1. Opening of the Meeting.
  2. Election of officers.
  3. Adoption of the agenda.
  4. Review of the regional situation and prospects for ageing.
  5. Draft plan of action on ageing for Asia and the Pacific.
  6. Adoption of the Plan of Action on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific.

### **IV. REVIEW OF THE REGIONAL SITUATION AND PROSPECTS FOR AGEING**

14. The Meeting had before it document SD/RM/PAA/INF.1 entitled "Asia and the Pacific into the twenty-first century: prospects for older persons", which it used as information material for its deliberations under that agenda item.

15. The Meeting exchanged experiences and views on the situation and prospects for ageing and older persons in the Asian and Pacific region. It recognized the rapid ageing of populations and the sizeable number of older persons in countries across the region and the socio-economic implications of that phenomenon. While recognizing intercountry variations in population ageing, the Meeting agreed on the underlying trend of the rising proportion and number of older people. The significance of that trend and its impact on the region were discussed.

16. The Meeting discussed the evolution of national policies on ageing in the region, noting that, in many countries, a national policy on ageing was either in existence or in the formulation process. It observed that national focal points on ageing and older persons and a service infrastructure had been established in many countries. The Meeting noted that, within that policy framework, a longer-term view in planning for older persons was adopted while immediate problems and needs were also

17. The Meeting reaffirmed the importance of the family as an institution in the countries of the region, and its unique role in the provision of care for older persons. It recognized the special need to support the family in performing its role of care provider for older persons, especially with large numbers of married women joining the workforce.

18. In discussing the prospects for ageing, the Meeting observed the increasing emphasis on community-based care and services as a key thrust of government services for older persons. Community-based care, which was more accessible and focused, was recognized as a cost-effective supplement to traditional institutions. The Meeting indicated that community-based care should be further promoted since it had helped to reduce reliance on hospitals as a provider of long-term care. It was also noted that communities were able to provide support for the family in caring for older persons.

19. The Meeting expressed its concern over the lack of resources to plan for a fuller range of services for older persons and the importance of mobilizing adequate resources. In that regard, the Meeting expressed its appreciation of the role of NGOs, both local and international, as important partners with governments in delivering services to older persons and their family. Effective cooperation between governments, NGOs and the corporate sector would greatly enhance the existing service capacity. The corporate sector should be more actively involved as part of the service infrastructure for older persons.

#### **V. DRAFT PLAN OF ACTION ON AGEING FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC**

20. The Meeting had before it a draft plan of action on ageing for Asia and the Pacific prepared by the secretariat in accordance with comments and observations made on a preliminary draft by the Regional Workshop on Preparations for the International Year of Older Persons, held at Beijing from 26 to 29 May 1998. Following extensive deliberations, in which NGO participation was welcomed, the text of the Plan of Action on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific was agreed upon.

21. The Meeting formulated the Macau Declaration on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific and decided to annex the Plan of Action to that Declaration.

22. The Meeting unanimously adopted the Macau Declaration on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific, which contained the Plan of Action on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific, on 1 October 1998.

#### **VI. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT**

23. The Meeting adopted its report on 1 October 1998.

## MACAU DECLARATION ON AGEING FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

We, the members and associate members of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific attending the Regional Meeting on a Plan of Action on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific convened at Macau from 28 September to 1 October 1998:

*Appreciating* the contribution that older persons are making and can continue to make to their societies,

*Recognizing* that, in the Charter of the United Nations, the peoples of the United Nations declare, *inter alia*, their determination to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

*Recalling* General Assembly resolution 47/5 of 16 October 1992, in which the Assembly decided to observe the year 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons, and its resolution 50/141 of 21 December 1995, in which it invited the regional commissions to bear in mind the goals of the Year when convening regional meetings in 1998 and 1999 at which to mark the Year and formulate action plans on ageing for the twenty-first century,

*Reaffirming* the relevance and need for continued implementation of the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing, adopted at the World Assembly on Ageing in 1982, which was the first comprehensive international instrument in the field of ageing that set out the principles and guidelines for the formulation and implementation of policies concerning ageing and older persons,

*In pursuance of* the Manila Declaration on the Agenda for Action on Social Development in the ESCAP Region adopted at the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Conference in Preparation for the World Summit for Social Development in October 1994,

*Noting* that the ageing of societies in the twentieth century, unprecedented in the history of mankind, poses a serious and complex challenge to all nations and requires a basic change in social attitude towards ageing and older persons and in the way in which societies organize themselves,

*Aware* that the Asian and Pacific region is rooted in the dynamism of social, economic and cultural development, that, in the region, individuals are reaching an advanced age in greater numbers and are in better health, and that the tremendous diversity in the situation of older persons, not only between countries but also within countries, requires a variety of policy responses,

*Mindful* that, in many countries, the family, as the natural fundamental unit of society, needs to be strengthened as a system of support in the provision of care and protection for older persons,

*Reaffirming* our solidarity and collective support of the spirit of regional cooperation in addressing issues of common concern relating to ageing and older persons,

**Expressing** a firm commitment to accord priority to the development of older persons, to take immediate measures to bring active older persons into the economic and social mainstream and to meet the basic needs and social security of rural and urban elderly,

**Urging** the international community and development assistance bodies to provide full support and adequate resources for the region's pursuit of the goals and targets contained in the international and regional mandates related to ageing and older persons mentioned above,

**Acknowledging** the national experience and capacity of members and associate members to formulate, strengthen and implement their respective policies concerning ageing and older persons, mindful of their own social, economic and political conditions,

1. **Adopt** the Plan of Action on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific as annexed to the present Declaration;

2. **Urge** members and associate members:

(a) To set corresponding goals and targets in accordance with the Plan of Action;

(b) To establish and strengthen their respective national policies on ageing and national mechanisms for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Plan of Action;

3. **Call upon** the Commission to devote at least one plenary meeting at its fifty-fifth annual session, to be held in 1999, to the commemoration of the International Year of Older Persons and to generate greater awareness of issues related to ageing and older persons;

4. **Recommend** that the Commission endorse the Plan of Action on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific at that session and provide support for its successful implementation;

5. **Also call upon** the Commission and other concerned United Nations and international organizations to assist in the early and full implementation of the Plan of Action on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific.



## Annex

### PLAN OF ACTION ON AGEING FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

#### Introduction

1. The Plan of Action on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific addresses important issues relating to ageing and older persons by identifying specific courses of action to be taken by countries of the region, individually and collectively. It contains concise recommendations with specific guidelines. Individual countries will set their own goals and targets within the framework of the recommendations and implement them in accordance with their national circumstances.

2. The present Plan of Action draws on the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing, adopted at the World Assembly on Ageing in 1982, the Proclamation on Ageing as annexed to General Assembly resolution 47/5 of 16 October 1992, the United Nations Principles for Older Persons and other relevant United Nations mandates relating to ageing and older persons. It is also supportive of the relevant goals and targets contained in the Programme of Action adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994, the Copenhagen Programme of Action adopted at the World Summit for Social Development in 1995 and of the Agenda for Action on Social Development in the ESCAP Region as revised by the Fifth Asian and Pacific Ministerial Conference on Social Development in 1997.

3. In formulating the present Plan of Action, the governments recognize that, for many developing countries in the region, the overall social and economic development of the nation, including the provision of basic social services for all the population, remains the priority national task. Hunger, poverty, ill health, social exclusion, unemployment, and limited access to education and basic amenities are critical national areas of concern requiring corrective action and competing for scarce resources. The governments appreciate the need to view the issues relating to ageing and older persons within this broader developmental context of priorities, needs and resource allocation.

#### I. Major areas of concern relating to ageing and older persons

4. The governments recognize that the twentieth century has heralded, in the Asian and Pacific region, the beginning of a demographic transformation that will have a profound impact on the countries in the region. At its core, the transformation dramatically alters the age structure of all societies, disproportionately increasing the number and percentage of older persons. The twin processes of mortality and fertility reduction contribute to this dramatic increase in the proportion of older persons which, in some countries, is expected to rise to as high as 25 per cent by the early twenty-first century. The combined effects of improved longevity and declining fertility lead to a maturing of the age structure, with a high concentration of the population in the middle or older ages. The increase in the presence of older persons will be felt in all aspects of social life.

5. The rise in the population of older persons, in absolute and relative terms, poses challenges in

both developmental and humanitarian areas. At the societal, developmental level, the effects of structural changes in the age composition of the population on the social, economic and political life of a society will be profound. The sheer size of the older population will impact on existing societal arrangements, such as age at retirement and relative political influence. The differential size of the younger and older populations will further lead to a shift in the economic dynamics of production, consumption, savings and investment. The aggregate effects of these changes are multifaceted and are just beginning to be appreciated. Research on the development implications at country and regional levels is intensifying and will guide future policy responses.

6. At the community and individual levels, the humanitarian needs of older persons require special attention. Societies have to promote and safeguard the rights and well-being of older persons. This includes the prevention of age discrimination and the promotion of productive ageing. The aspirations, knowledge and energy of older persons need to be effectively channelled in the process of national economic and social development. The service infrastructure needs to be broadened and strengthened to meet the social, emotional, health, financial and developmental needs of this growing population.

7. This demographic phenomenon is occurring within a context of changes in national institutions and values because of rapid social and economic development. The traditional institutions for the care of older persons, such as the family and the community, are undergoing transformation in response to these changes. Traditional support may no longer be adequate or may have diminished. The support systems for older persons need to be re-examined with a view to improving their scope and effectiveness.

8. The present Plan of Action addresses seven areas of concern relating to ageing and older persons in the Asian and Pacific region: (a) the social position of older persons; (b) older persons and the family; (c) health and nutrition; (d) housing, transportation and the built environment; (e) older persons and the market; (f) income security, maintenance and employment; and (g) social services and the community.

## **II. Action on major areas of concern**

9. Noting that the demographic transformation will manifest its full impact in the decades to come, the governments recognize that population ageing is imminent. It is an important phenomenon with long-term concerns, posing no immediate difficulties but increasing pressure on the socio-economic development of the nation. For most countries, the structural changes in the age composition of the population have thus far been slow and the number of older persons manageable. However, in many areas, immediate action must be taken.

10. The immediate tasks for the Asian and Pacific region focus on four major areas: the understanding of the issues and implications of population ageing on society; the preparation of the population for an ageing process that is productive and fulfilling; the development of a service infrastructure and environment based on traditional and modern institutions that will be able to meet present and future needs; and the delivery of essential services needed by the growing number of older

persons.

11. There is a continuum among the countries in the Asian and Pacific region in respect of the level of governmental interest in issues relating to ageing and older persons, and the extensiveness of the policies and programmes initiated for older persons. Underlying these differences, however, is a universal awareness that the issues and challenges are similar across countries and much can be learnt from the experiences of each other. These issues and challenges emanate from the demographic and social realities that are faced by all countries in the region.

#### **A. Social position of older persons**

12. The conventional perception of older persons tends to be negative. Older persons are often depicted as frail, disabled and dependent. Economically and socially, they are perceived to be at risk of being marginalized as countries go through rapid economic and technological development. The reality, as documented in research findings, is very different. The older persons in the region engage in a variety of activities that have a significant bearing on the cultural, social and economic life of a country. They have a significant presence in both formal and informal sectors. Most of them are healthy and independent. In an era of rapid globalization and technological change, the older person is a cultural icon providing continuity and stability in the country's traditions. The contributions of older persons have proved to be valuable resources for the country's social and economic development.

13. Ageing is an extension of life that has been made possible by technological advances, especially those in medical and health services. As life expectancy continues to rise and more people are living to older ages, the role of older persons assumes special significance. The preparation for a productive and meaningful role at older ages should be undertaken at both the individual and the society level. At the individual level, the extension of life must be associated with personal satisfaction and fulfilment achieved through involvement in family, community and workplace activities. This involvement is a lifelong process that starts from an early age, a process that should be nurtured in preparing younger people for life at older ages. At the society level, preparation for productive ageing should include steps such as lifelong education and provision of equal opportunity, to allow older persons to remain engaged in as many social, economic and community activities as possible.

14. The governments recognize that, in preparation for an ageing society, serious efforts should be made to dispel the negative perception of older persons. A new, positive role for older persons will be vigorously inculcated, a role based on the positive contributions of older persons in the family and in society. In this regard, the governments will give due publicity to the United Nations Principles for Older Persons within the national and cultural context. The governments will harness the contributions of older persons as a national resource and ensure that future generations benefit from a programme of lifelong preparation for productive ageing.

#### **B. Older persons and the family**

15. The family has a distinctive place in the countries of the Asian and Pacific region. It is the most basic social unit, with much of the country's social and economic life revolving around it. In many rural communities, it is also the economic unit engaging in productive activities. Binding the families together are deeply rooted cultural mores and religious practices. Filial piety, which underpins the relationship between generations, is a key attribute that reinforces the family's cohesiveness. The older person is guaranteed a special position in the family, giving and receiving support from other family members.

16. The region has a high regard for the unique role that the family plays in supporting older persons. Most countries place special emphasis on the family as the frontline institution in their plans for population ageing. They realize that the emotional, social, physical and economic supports provided by the family are indispensable and cannot be replaced by any other institutions. It is also recognized that the family institution remains strong in spite of cultural changes and migratory movements. In many countries, it is an accepted planning norm that the family will continue to play this critical support role in the century to come.

17. The governments appreciate the forces that have adversely affected the capacity of the family to support and care for older persons. Declining family size, the increasing number of women joining the workforce, the diminishing extended family arrangement and the geographic mobility of family members are contributing factors. They reduce the number of potential caregivers within the family and the options of burden-sharing. Given these changes, it becomes necessary for governments to take effective steps to enhance the care-giving capability of the family through appropriate programmes. This is a cost-effective approach and is compatible with the cultural mores of the region.

18. Recognizing the importance of the care-giving role of the family, governments agree to initiate comprehensive programmes that will strengthen the family in this aspect. The programmes should include the following elements:

- (a) Promotion of co-residence through housing policies and financial incentives;
- (b) Provision of home nursing services for the older persons;
- (c) Provision of facilities for respite care;
- (d) Provision of programmes on counselling, professional guidance and emotional support;
- (e) Strengthening of inter-generational relationships.

19. The governments are aware of the existence of vulnerable older persons whose families are no longer able to offer support or who have no family. These groups of older persons, which include the destitute, the low-income, the minorities, the displaced, the disabled and persons with long-term medical conditions, require direct humanitarian assistance. These groups should receive special attention and be adequately covered by the social safety net. The governments will identify and assess the size of these groups and the extent to which assistance is required. In this regard, the governments recognize that widows constitute the largest group among older persons. Their special needs will be monitored and met through special programmes. Older persons, especially those without children, are among the most vulnerable during natural disasters and emergencies. The governments will make adequate provision for older persons in emergency planning and relief efforts.

20. The governments will pay special tribute to the contributions of the older persons to the family institution. The notion that older persons only receive support and contributions from their family members should be dispelled. The inter-generational exchange is two-way, with all members benefiting from the process. The assistance rendered by older persons range from intangibles such as helping with child care to providing financial support for the family. These contributions, taken together, strengthen the family unit and bind the generations over the life course.

### **C. Health and nutrition**

21. While older persons are prone to age-related illnesses, the ageing process is not necessarily associated with poor health. Cohorts of older persons are now reaching the same age in better health than before. Research has shown that maintenance of good health can be achieved through proper nutrition, early diagnosis, preventive care and healthy lifestyles, including harmonious family life, health and physical education and social participation. The promotion and implementation of these low-cost, prevention-based initiatives could significantly enhance the well-being of older persons.

22. Advances in medical technologies in the past decades have made possible the prolongation of life through better medical care and intensive interventions. These new technologies are, however, expensive and are not easily accessible to the average person. The majority of the population comes in contact with primary and secondary health care facilities. Improvements in these facilities would have a more significant impact on the quality of life among the masses. For older persons, whose contacts with health facilities are more frequent, economical and preventive services are essential.

23. The health needs of the older persons are multidimensional. While physical health is often the

focus of attention, the psychological and mental health of older persons is equally important in ensuring their sense of well-being. A system of coordinated care will be put in place to evaluate the health needs of older persons in a holistic manner and to implement appropriate person-oriented interventions. Within this system, suitable programmes will be instituted to detect the presence of psychological and mental problems and provide suitable solutions.

24. The governments agree with the need to put a systematic programme of activities in place to educate the population on healthy ageing. The components of healthy ageing include awareness of physiological changes, understanding of the symptoms of common ailments and the risk factors of poor health, and the adoption of a healthy lifestyle. Information about common ailments such as high blood pressure, diabetes, cataract, arthritis, osteoporosis and neuro-psychiatric diseases such as Parkinson's and Alzheimer's will be disseminated, accompanied by early diagnosis and mass screening programmes. Nutritional advice will be provided to minimize dietary deficiencies and imbalances. The governments reaffirm that these low-cost, community-based activities will be integrated into existing community health programmes.

25. The governments recognize that the health care of older persons will be a key issue in the future resulting in significant budgetary commitments. Regional variations in health care financing do exist, reflecting country preferences. However, more innovative options need to be evolved including co-payment of medical costs between employees and employers, the setting up of medical funds to cover medical expenses and the establishment of insurance-based schemes to provide financing for major illnesses and hospitalization needs.

#### **D. Housing, transportation and the built environment**

26. In the Asian and Pacific region, older persons tend to live with the family. For them, the family house is the centre of almost all activities. Their quality of life is thus unavoidably affected by the adequacy of living conditions. Ensuring a proper living environment has been a national concern for regional countries. The governments have associated themselves with the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000, which obliges the State to assume responsibility for the protection and improvement of housing conditions. Resources should be made available to address the housing needs of the older persons.

27. To the extent possible, the governments will ensure that older persons have a reasonable and adequate living environment. Barrier-free access throughout the community will be made possible through appropriate means. Incentives will be given to facilitate home upgrading and improvements to the surrounding environment. Public housing programmes will include options for older persons who live alone either by choice or by circumstance. For older persons who need community residential care, it is important that nursing homes and shelters for the aged destitute are well run and deliver satisfactory levels of care and service.

28. Special arrangements will be made to meet the transportation needs of older persons. Concessions in travel fares will be considered for older persons commuting by public transport. Wherever feasible, adaptations will be made to the physical environment and transportation infrastructure to facilitate the independent, unrestricted mobility of older persons. The governments will promote road safety as older persons are particularly at risk of traffic accidents.

#### **E. Older persons and the market**

29. Older persons are a special group of consumers, as many of them require specialized goods and services in their daily living. The provision of such goods and services is generally undertaken by the private sector. In some countries, this has grown to become a well-defined market with older persons becoming captive consumers. However, the range and the quality of goods and services, as well as their prices, may vary, depending on the size of the market and the number of firms. Older persons, particularly those consumers with limited purchasing power or knowledge of the products, may be susceptible to monopolistic pricing and unscrupulous or aggressive market practices. Governments will ensure that their rights as consumers, as provided for in the United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection, are recognized and safeguarded. Older persons should be encouraged to join or form consumer groups to safeguard their interest.

30. The governments recognize the potential of private sector initiatives in meeting the day-to-day needs of older persons through pay-for-service transactions. These initiatives are important market mechanisms responding to the needs and demands of the consumers. As the number of older persons increases, innovative private sector services are likely to emerge to cater to their special needs. The rise of a service industry catering to older persons is inevitable, and it has already happened in many countries in the region. The governments will facilitate and regulate the development of this market by providing appropriate incentives and guidance and by putting safeguards in place to prevent abuse and ensure minimum standards.

#### **F. Income security, maintenance and employment**

31. Income security at older ages is affected by a number of factors. The ability to accumulate wealth during the younger years determines the degree to which an older person is financially vulnerable. A reasonable stock of savings may see an older person through years with no income and ensure an acceptable standard of living. The maintenance of a steady income stream through gainful employment provides the best guarantee of financial security. In countries where social security or pension benefits are available, financial security is further assured by societal arrangements. The family will, in many cases, provide the ultimate safeguard for an older person's financial well-being.

32. Saving for old age is a tradition in the Asian and Pacific region. The practice is widespread, hence the region's reputation of having the highest savings rates in the world. In economies with a prominent formal sector, a steady wage income allows many families to save for old age and for other

contingencies. In rural communities, and in the informal sector, savings for old age may be a lesser concern when the day-to-day livelihood is at constant risk. Nonetheless, saving for old age remains a valued behaviour and is carried out whenever possible.

33. The governments will assess the extent to which the different sectors of the population are saving for old age. Savings during the economically active life span of each person provide for the consumption needs in retirement years. This is a key element in a person's lifelong preparation for old age. Many countries already have a mechanism to encourage savings among the population. This mechanism will be expanded with adequate incentives to facilitate the saving habit. Appropriate mechanisms need to be established in countries where no such schemes exist.

34. The governments note that employment for older persons is critical for financial security as it generates an income flow. Participation in the workforce will be encouraged as long as older persons are able to continue to work. They should not be forced out of their jobs by a rigid retirement age or other discriminatory practices. A flexible retirement scheme and legal protection will enable capable older persons to remain economically active. Job creation and retention programmes should be established to bring back older workers. Such programmes will also enhance the employability of older workers through upgrading of knowledge and skills. Self-employment among older persons will be encouraged through advisory services and other assistance.

35. A variety of social security or pension schemes exist in the region. These are designed in line with national circumstances. In cases where only partial coverage is provided, there is a need to extend the coverage, especially to vulnerable groups such as the older destitute, widows, housewives and the disabled. The governments will constantly review the adequacy of the benefits to meet a reasonable standard of living. Where possible, additional resources will be devoted to social security schemes to improve the coverage and the current level of benefits. The governments realize that the sustainability and viability of social security schemes are an important policy issue, and urge that intensive studies be made to examine the implications and to evolve new instruments of income security.

#### **G. Social services and the community**

36. As a result of the physiological, social and financial changes that older persons experience, they may require assistance from time to time to regain a sense of well-being. Events such as the demise of a spouse, retirement from work and onset of age-related illnesses may put older persons through brief periods of distress. External help or support may be needed by some to bring relief and expedite adjustment. Such assistance may include temporary day-care rehabilitation, counselling or dietary advice. These services, taken together, help older persons to overcome their temporary difficulties and improve their well-being. The focus on age-related difficulties sets these services apart from traditional welfare programmes, though some overlap does exist.

37. There is much variability among countries in the coverage and accessibility of social services for older persons. The variability is dependent on the levels of financial and manpower resources available



for allocation to social services. Within each country, variability also exists between urban and rural areas. The urban areas tend to have a higher concentration of service centres, leading to better coverage and accessibility.

38. The governments recognize the occasional need for social service assistance by older persons. Adequate resources will be committed to ensure that a reasonable level of services is available to older persons in each member country. Proper coordination of government and non-governmental service agencies will be implemented to establish an adequate network of services that reach out to older persons in both urban and rural areas.

39. With their experience, knowledge and mature outlook, older persons form a potential pool of expertise that can be tapped for community projects and activities. As residents of the community, they are familiar with local circumstances and their inputs could be a critical success factor. As key beneficiaries, they also have much to gain from sharing pertinent information and skills in community projects. There are ample opportunities available for community participation of older persons and extension of help to each other.

40. The governments agree that older persons constitute a valuable resource in the community. The governments will open up avenues for their participation through membership in community clubs and resident associations. Associations of older persons will be encouraged, and older persons will be empowered to undertake projects that would improve community well-being.

### **III. Implementation: structures and processes**

41. The governments recognize that the task of implementing the Plan of Action is a national responsibility, requiring the combined efforts of the government, non-governmental organizations and other social units. To this end, member countries will establish appropriate structures and processes in accordance with their differing national circumstances. These structures and processes are components of a national service infrastructure which enhances, safeguards and preserves the well-being of older persons and promotes their participation in society.

#### **A. National infrastructure for ageing and older persons**

42. Recognizing the importance of organizing and instituting a national infrastructure that will deal with issues relating to ageing and older persons in a holistic and integrated manner, the governments commit themselves to building this infrastructure as an integral part of the implementation of the Plan of Action. They will seek to balance the needs of the old against the demands of the young, and allocate adequate resources to meet the needs of older persons while satisfying the requirements of all social groups, with particular emphasis on women, the poor and people in rural areas.

43. A national infrastructure for ageing should consist of three principal components: (a) governmental institutions and non-governmental organizations; community-based organizations and

organizations of older persons; and resources, including personnel concerned with ageing and older persons; (b) a service delivery network with acceptable standards of service quality; and (c) an information, training and research apparatus on ageing issues.

44. The governments will examine the present arrangement of institutions and agencies dealing with older persons and enhance their coordination as a total system. There are many elements in this system, from government agencies such as the pension office and old-age homes to non-governmental service centres. A central coordinating agency should be established to ensure the adequacy of the system to respond to the needs of older persons.

45. The governments, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations, will assess the training needs of personnel in the institutions and agencies and initiate plans to upgrade the skills of personnel. Health personnel, community and social workers and researchers need to keep abreast of the latest developments in their specialized fields that impinge on the ageing. Formal learning, informal on-the-job training and exchange of information and experiences will be encouraged among the front-line personnel to strengthen their professional capabilities and enhance their productivity.

46. Many countries already have a system of service delivery to older persons and their families. This includes medical, health, social and other related services. The governments will enhance service quality, improve coverage and reduce wastage. The governments will also promote the establishment of service standards that are important yardsticks by which the well-being of older persons can be judged. While the setting of standards may depend on the resources available, evolution to higher standards over time is important.

47. The governments will encourage the establishment of an information and research apparatus on ageing and issues relating to older persons. Many concerns of older persons are new and linked to the changes in societies at large. National planning and research efforts are essential to understand and assess these concerns, their societal impact and policy options. In support of the research activities and as inputs for planning and policy-making, the governments will undertake to establish national databanks on older persons. Where necessary, surveys on the ageing will be conducted to provide benchmark information and measure changes over time. The governments will support social policy analysis based on reliable empirical databases.

### **B. Planning and targeting**

48. With a national infrastructure for the ageing in place, plans and programmes can be drawn up to meet the guidelines in the Plan of Action. The governments will specify attainable goals and targets for the national plans and programmes in terms of quantifiable outputs to be produced within well-defined time-frames. Such targeting of national plans and programmes is essential for assessment of the progress achieved. The governments will consider the planning and targeting of programmes in conjunction with resource availability and allocation. Inputs should be obtained from all participating sectors so that the plans made and targets set are within reasonable and realizable limits. While setting targets, the

governments will give due consideration to promoting gender equality and minimizing rural-urban imbalance.

### **C. Intersectoral collaboration and support**

49. In the multisectoral approach to the present Plan of Action, the governments appreciate the need to work in close cooperation and collaboration with non-governmental organizations and the private sector. The wide-ranging nature of the issues concerning older persons requires a holistic and systemic response from society at all levels.

50. The governments are aware of the critical role that non-governmental organizations play. Many of these organizations are pioneers in organizing and delivering services to older persons. In many member countries, they are the core institutions in the national infrastructure for ageing. The governments will encourage the development of a strong non-governmental sector and enhance the participation of these organizations in planning and implementing policies and programmes concerning older persons. Facilitation of the development of this sector should include the formulation of a legal framework for the establishment and registration of such organizations, and the provision of budgetary subvention and assistance in other forms to them.

51. Open competition by the private sector in service delivery can improve efficiency and cost-effectiveness. The governments will provide all opportunities for the private sector to complement public programmes on health care, housing and other basic services for older persons. Where the private sector can bring about better standards in services, the governments should consider the privatization of such services.

### **D. Coordination and monitoring**

52. The implementation of the present Plan of Action must be well coordinated at the national level. National coordination of all the sectors involved in the ageing issues minimizes duplication and facilitates the optimal allocation of resources. Piecemeal solutions to the issues may bring the desired outcome in one area, but may lead to adverse consequences in another. The solutions, like the issues themselves, are multifaceted. Their implementation requires careful coordination by all sectors.

53. Recognizing the need for sectoral coordination, the governments will designate a national coordinating body to provide the overall policy direction and guidance in planning and formulation of national programmes. The national coordinating agency on ageing will be represented by all sectors, with leadership being provided by the governments. It is essential to monitor and review the implementation of the present Plan of Action on a regular basis, at intervals to be determined by each country. There will be consultation of the players involved at every stage of the implementation. Such consultation during the monitoring and review process will provide insightful feedback to the national coordinating agency on changes in local conditions and the ensuing adjustments required to be made to the national plans and programmes.

### **E. Resource mobilization and allocation**

54. The governments recognize that a national infrastructure for ageing can only function with adequate financial and manpower resources. Many countries in the region are, however, faced with multiple priorities in their budgetary provisions and manpower plans. The governments must show the commitment to review such national priorities and, where necessary, revise them to ensure the judicious mobilization and allocation of resources for the implementation of the present Plan of Action.

55. Funding support from the regular government budget is essential for a large number of programmes and services for older persons. The governments will increase, where possible, their financial contributions to the national infrastructure for ageing and older persons. The governments will explore new ways of financing, including the establishment of a dedicated fund to provide additional resources for implementing the present Plan of Action.

56. As well as the State, which provides direct financing, non-governmental organizations are important agents in mobilizing financial resources from the community. The governments will give them appropriate assistance in their fund-raising activities and guidance for sound financial administration. In some countries, matching or capital grants, tax exemptions and other fiscal incentives are instruments used by the government to facilitate community resource mobilization.

57. Volunteerism, which exists in all societies, provides a ready source of financial and manpower resources. The governments will encourage all expressions of volunteerism in services to older persons, by giving appropriate training, guidance and due recognition as far as possible. Many older persons themselves are volunteers. The governments will accord high priority to help older volunteers in organizing themselves and providing services for others.

## **F. Regional and international cooperation**

58. Regional and international cooperation on issues related to ageing and older persons has made a significant contribution towards the implementation of the mandates of the Vienna Plan of Action and other global initiatives. Current modalities of cooperation at the country, regional or international level include the exchange of information, joint research and training activities, awareness creation and demonstration projects. The governments call upon all regional and international entities to strengthen their commitment to these current modalities and to establish new avenues of cooperation.

59. As the regional arm of the United Nations for Asia and the Pacific and the focal point for the region on issues related to ageing and older persons, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific should continue to carry out its unique role in facilitating the exchange of national experiences, carrying out joint training, research and planning activities and providing technical assistance and information and advisory services to its members and associate members. The governments call on the Commission, in collaboration with concerned United Nations bodies and specialized agencies, to design programmes for regional cooperation in support of the present Plan of Action. The Commission should continue to give support to countries in establishing regional cooperation mechanisms, resource mobilization from multilateral donor institutions, coordination with international organizations in activities on ageing, and monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Plan of Action. The capabilities of the Commission to undertake the above and serve as the regional focal point for United Nations agencies on all activities and programmes on ageing and related issues should be strengthened.

60. The governments call upon the United Nations system to increase its support of the infrastructure for ageing and older persons at the country level. Such support will include the provision of technical assistance in policy and programme development, financial support for major initiatives and a mechanism for capacity-building. Specific measures can take the form of dissemination of relevant information and technical materials, the conducting of seminars, workshops and training courses on ageing and related social issues, advisory services on programme planning and evaluation, assessment of training needs and priorities, and the design of training materials.

61. The governments welcome the initiatives of international non-governmental organizations and their regional and in-country representatives. The positive outcomes of their activities for older persons should be placed on record and given due recognition. The governments encourage all international non-governmental organizations to intensify their efforts in the interests of the older persons of the world. An important area of contribution from these organizations will be the provision of technical assistance to enhance the national information, training and research capabilities of countries in the region.

62. Given the differing conditions in the population and development status of various subregions of the Asian and Pacific region, the governments agree that the present Plan of Action could be viewed at subregional levels. The governments urge the Commission and concerned international organizations to

provide subregional organizations with appropriate technical assistance and other support in defining and implementing programmes in accordance with the Plan of Action.

63. The governments call upon the secretariat of the Commission to review progress in the implementation of the Plan of Action and report its findings and recommendations for further action by all concerned to the Commission at its annual session in 2001 and every five years thereafter.