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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:
priority theme: rethinking and strengthening social development
in the contemporary world**

Statement submitted by HelpAge International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.5/2015/1.



Statement

Social development can be defined as the process of structural and societal change through which individuals and social groups attain improvements associated with well-being and compatible with justice.

The scale and rate of demographic change in the twenty-first century are causing adjustments at all levels of society across the world. Population ageing presents a range of opportunities as well as challenges, and the social, economic and environmental implications of this global demographic trend must be fully embraced for stronger social development.

Member States that are considering social development at the fifty-third session of the Commission for Social Development have an unprecedented opportunity to rethink and discuss the issues of social development and ageing, and strengthen their responses to them, in the ongoing intergovernmental process concerned with the post-2015 sustainable development framework. The framework must be relevant for a world in which, by 2030, there will be more people over the age of 60 years worldwide than children under the age of 10 years. Already, two-thirds of the world's population over the age of 60 years is living in developing countries, and of the 15 countries that currently have more than 10 million older people, 7 are developing countries.

The post-2015 vision of the Secretary-General, set out in the report "A life of dignity for all: accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and advancing the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015", describes an ambitious, transformative and universal agenda that is applicable to all countries and leaves no one behind. Member States agree that the eradication of poverty, as well as sustainable development for all, by 2030 is needed. Together with its partners across the world, HelpAge International shares this vision, which leaves no one behind and is fully grounded in human rights principles, including universality, non-discrimination, equality, participation, empowerment and accountability. The organization is encouraged that the final outcome document of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, adopted by consensus in September 2014, builds on this vision, and embeds responses to population ageing and to older people in a number of goals and targets. The organization is pleased that this document will be the main basis upon which sustainable development goals will be integrated into the post-2015 agenda.

The organization is, nevertheless, fully aware that the references to age do not guarantee that the language used in the outcome document of the Open Working Group will remain in the final negotiated framework. More must be done to ensure that policymaking is responsive and accountable to older citizens. The dialogue on strengthened social development must also be people-centred, for all ages and abilities, and must embrace difference and promote equality of opportunity for all throughout the life course.

For this to happen, strengthened social development and the post-2015 agenda must build on and reflect existing agreements on ageing reached at the Second World Assembly on Ageing, held in 2002, which are spelled out in the Political Declaration and Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. That agreement called for a bottom-up, accountable approach to implementing its provisions,

meaning that older women and men should be informed about them and consulted on their implementation.

Accountability will be the bedrock of the new framework, and must extend to all citizens, of all ages. Accountability issues for older persons matter since many feel that they are not visible, listened to or taken into account. Consultations with older people are at the heart of the work of HelpAge International, and older people are very consistent in their messages. They are very clear about the issues that confront them, the nature of the contributions they make to family and society and what they ask of their Government and the society in which they live. They ask for income security (currently, only one in four people over the age of 65 years in low- and middle-income countries receives a pension), access to appropriate and affordable health care, freedom from violence, abuse and discrimination, access to decent employment and fair working conditions, opportunities for retraining and life-long learning and an enabling environment that challenges isolation and discrimination and, in turn, supports social connections and participation. They call for their rights to be articulated in a convention. These concerns must be reflected in strengthened social development and in the sustainable development agenda, backed up by targets and indicators that allow the measurement of progress and accountability to older persons.

Such indicators can be found in the Global AgeWatch Index, now in its second year, a framework developed by HelpAge International to measure the progress of countries in extending quality of life and well-being in old age. The 2014 Index covers 96 countries, representing 91 per cent of the global population of persons over the age of 60 years. Its domains and indicators are compiled from internationally comparable data in the public domain, and measure income poverty, health status, education and employment, as well as such aspects of the enabling environment as access to public transport, civic freedom, physical safety and social connections. While the 2014 Index report shows that efforts are being made in many countries to improve quality of life and well-being for older persons, it also shows that every country has room for improvement. It clearly shows that economic growth alone is not enough to advance the well-being of older people. It also shows that a narrow focus on economic growth has resulted in greater income inequality, leaving many older people short of income, food and health-care support, and facing insecurity and vulnerability in old age.

Income inequality is as much a concern for developed countries as it is for developing ones, and for older and younger generations alike. It reinforces the absolute priority of extending and promoting social protection, which is at the heart of the social contract between the State and its citizens, and is a core enabler of healthy lives, productive livelihoods and environmental sustainability. Social protection supports the realization of multiple goals beyond poverty and inequality. It is to be welcomed that one of the proposed targets for poverty eradication in the post-2015 framework includes the progressive implementation of social protection floors.

The 2014 Global AgeWatch Index report shows, too, how better health care for all, at all ages, is urgent. The ageing of the population and the survival into midlife and older age of millions more people is an undoubted triumph for public health over the past century. In too many countries, however, health care as we age is deficient. As older age becomes the norm in all countries, the life-course approach

for health, which emphasises the right of all to equitable access to health services at all ages, from the very young to the very old, must be prioritized.

Decent work in later life is another fundamental human right that promotes not only social and sustainable development, but also social cohesion and harmonious societies. Everywhere, the working population, paid and unpaid, is ageing. For example, farm populations in many countries are ageing faster than urban populations and the overall rural population. Sustainable development goals must therefore enable people in later life to have not only a regular and predictable income, but also a decent work life, should they wish to have one, and to have their workers' rights recognized. In fact, many older people in developing countries are denied such rights; they work in the informal sector without contracts, security or benefits and in badly paid environments that are unsafe, damaging to health and demeaning. Because of poverty, illiteracy, age discrimination, poor health and the absence of pensions, it is increasingly the norm that older women and men shoulder such essential, but unrecognized and unpaid, work as caring for and supporting children and grandchildren, particularly those affected by poverty, migration and HIV/AIDS.

Discrimination on the basis of age and gender is ever-present and must be tackled. It is time to end the double burden of discrimination of age and gender. Women over 55 years of age make up one fifth of the world's women, and 54 per cent of all persons aged 60 years or over are female, rising to 62 per cent of those aged 80 years and above. It is critically important that actions to strengthen social development, as well as the sustainable development agenda, recognize the need to support older women, their capacity to have a dignified quality of life and their right to a decent standard of living. Despite their multiple contributions to family and community, older women are too often invisible and uncounted.

Rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world means ensuring that older women and men are visible, their voices are heard and they are counted. The report of the Independent Expert Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development provides important guidance when it states that "data are the lifeblood of decision-making and the raw material for accountability. Without high-quality data providing the right information on the right things at the right time, designing, monitoring and evaluating effective policies becomes almost impossible". The report makes the case for disaggregating data across the life course, pointing out that data for people over the age of 49 years is still not routinely collected in household surveys, and that "one of the most fundamental inequalities is between those who are counted and those who are not. Millions of people of all ages in low- and middle-income countries are denied basic services and protection of their rights because they are absent from official records."

Such acknowledgement that current data systems are not adequate in today's ageing world is an important step in the right direction. The absence of data on ageing leads directly to the absence of issues affecting older people in policies and development interventions. It is why global coordinated action is needed at all levels of the data system, from collection to utilisation, and from all stakeholders, to improve the quality and range of data on older women and men. In addition, data must be in the hands of older citizens to enable them to participate in policymaking that promotes sustainable development, and to hold their Governments accountable to them.

Concluding remarks

Older persons worldwide are asking that efforts to strengthen social development and to create a transformative post-2015 sustainable development framework include and respond to them and their concerns. They ask to be seen and heard. They call for an inclusive, life-course approach to policymaking and a secure future for their children and grandchildren. They ask for security, autonomy and dignity as they age.

Core recommendations

The organization makes the following recommendations:

- Implement and build on the commitments made by Member States at the Second World Assembly on Ageing to ensure social development and well-being for all people in later life
- Ensure that the post-2015 framework is grounded in the human rights principles of universality, non-discrimination, equality, participation, empowerment and accountability
- Implement national universal social protection systems, including social protection floors, in all countries, based on International Labour Organization recommendation No. 202 concerning national floors of social protection
- Tackle people's health needs in older age through universal, age-inclusive and appropriate health systems, together with a stand-alone target on non-communicable disease that emphasizes prevention, treatment, management and care
- Ensure that commitments on gender equality and women's empowerment are accompanied by the explicit recognition that they reach women of all ages
- Articulate and agree upon indicators for the framework that reflect the reality of population ageing and older people's lives, and are based on data disaggregated by sex and age, without upper age limits