



Welcome Remarks

Amal Abou Rafeh, Chief, Programme on Ageing

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this event on behalf of the UN Programme on Ageing.

At the outset, I would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to the **Stakeholder Group on Ageing**, who serve as the voice of older persons at the global level, for organizing this event. We are also very fortunate to have Ambassador Moritán, Chair of the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing, as well as Paul Ladd, Director of the UN Research Institute for Social Development – Paul, thank you for agreeing to moderate today’s discussion.

This morning marked the first day of the 7th session of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, where 47 countries will present their voluntary national reviews, sharing their experiences in implementing the 2030 Agenda. It is as has been often said “a time for reflection.”

Since the establishment of the Programme on Ageing last fall, our Team has also engaged in an exercise of reflection. You see, the General Assembly has been calling for ensuring that issues of relevance to older persons are taken into account in the implementation of Agenda 2030, with the promise of leaving no one behind.

But where did Member States stand in responding to that call?

We looked into it, and were surprised to find that, 85% of the 111 voluntary national reviews presented between 2016 and 2018, included references to ageing. You’ll be able to read our analysis in the upcoming Secretary-General’s report to the General Assembly – but one thing that stood out was that older persons were predominantly addressed as a vulnerable group. In fact, we found that the majority of the voluntary national reviews portrayed ageing-related issues as a **challenge**. For example, by focusing on concerns over sustainability of social services, pensions and healthcare systems - and also as a factor that **limits** long-term, economic and income growth.

Let’s cut to the chase.

We know well, that the global population of persons aged 60 and over is rising rapidly. Less than 2 weeks ago, in a historic first, the G20 Osaka Leaders’ Declaration “recognised the importance of promoting a healthy and active ageing society.” What is less understood, is that population ageing **need not be** framed **only as a** challenge, or a risk or a burden. Such characterization stems from a culture of ageism and is a barrier to developing sound public policies on ageing. The real question is rather: **how do we seize the opportunities presented by ageing societies?**

And just for a moment, let us put aside the matter of mega trends, and acknowledge, that regardless of the size of the older population, people retain the **right to live in dignity** as they age.

It's high time we re-examine our approach to ageing issues.

At this year's Forum, especially because of the themes that have been selected (equality, empowerment and inclusiveness), we are calling for a **paradigm shift** that leverages ageing as an opportunity and recognises older persons as active agents who already make substantial contributions to development.

And this cannot be achieved without "confronting ageism", which is what our distinguished panelists gathered here will address. I anticipate a rich and lively dialogue and I take this opportunity to welcome you once again.

Thank you.