Good Evening from Manila. It is a privilege and pleasure to be with you today to share some thoughts on Post-covid development and humanitarian action. Many thanks to UN DESA for including the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines in this meeting.
Every socio-economic response plan in building forward better must apply the human rights-based approach as the standard in surviving this global health crisis. Post-COVID-19 measures must always be informed by the Human Rights Situation of Older Persons as all UN Member States have committed to ensure through the Sustainable Development Goals that we “leave no one behind”.
Older persons are often stereotyped in terms of their physical capabilities – that they are unproductive members of society despite documented and factual evidence of their enormous contribution to the economy as consumers, taxpayers, and workers.

Even before the pandemic, these negative stereotypes have affected older persons’ rights such as the access to work and employment opportunities.
Many older persons resort to informal work as a matter of survival, rather than a matter of choice. It is therefore important to build systems that will enable older persons to do independent work and to engage in employment based on their right to decide freely to accept or choose work.

- Anti – Age Discrimination in Employment
- Capacity Building Programs and Life Long Learning Opportunities at the Community Level for participation in the Labor Market
- Revisiting Retirement Laws aligned with changing demographics
- Stimulus packages to generate business and employment must include Older Persons

While legislative measures are important, post-Covid measures to stimulate the economy should include enabling Older Persons to access employment and livelihood opportunities.
Many older persons live in poverty. In this pandemic, lockdowns have stalled economic activity and led to many livelihoods lost. The numbers of families and individuals living in poverty have risen. While many have been able to rely on contributory pensions especially during lockdowns (albeit inadequate), a vast many older persons who have worked in the informal economy and performed unpaid work do not have such access.
The distribution of social amelioration programs in the Philippines and other similar programs in other countries have helped ease the financial burden of older persons. However, post-Covid–19 measures should closely look at non-contributory social pensions. As noted in a study on pension systems in the Philippines, an effective pension system is critical not only to support dignity in later life, but as part of a broader strategy to tackle poverty and inequality. It bears emphasizing that it is especially needed more during times of emergencies such as this pandemic.

While building a comprehensive pension system demands a layered mix of programs, social pensions are central to ensuring universal coverage. **It is therefore imperative for countries to implement a non-contributory pension system that is adequate in amount to support a dignified life in older age and addresses coverage gaps left by contributory pension systems.** [Further, a non-contributory pension system addresses the unequal access to old-age pension by women who were not able to participate sufficiently or at all in formal employment or in the formal economy during their younger years due to caregiving duties.]
Policies should be based on data and evidence. There is currently a wide gap in understanding the heterogeneity of older persons’ characteristics and experiences as a sector. There is a need to improve the understanding of the situation and lived experiences of older persons through improved data collection, setting up of monitoring and evaluations systems, and the reporting on the situation of older persons.

There is a need to ensure high quality, accessible, open, timely, and reliable disaggregated data and for stronger advocacy efforts to mainstream the rights of older persons among statistical bodies and institutions. Information on older persons must not be excluded from data sets. However, data available usually lump people over 60 or 65 years of age together as a single homogeneous group. Disaggregated data identifies and characterizes the population that are most vulnerable and provides a full picture of the impact of COVID-19 and other crises to older persons. International bodies, NGOs, NHRIs, and other stakeholders should promote standardization of data disaggregation to enable comparison and monitoring among relevant government institutions.
[This may include the use of a five-year age band and the removal of upper age cut-off in the disaggregation protocols; the disaggregation of data, at least, by age, sex, and disability, and other critical dimensions such as co-morbidities, ethnicnicity, socio-economic status, household/family compositions and type of living quarters, for data driven decision-making; and the promotion of the participation of older persons by having their representatives collect and interpret data.]
There should also be careful interpretation and reporting of data to ensure the protection of older persons particularly from ageist beliefs. Even the definition of “older person” is arbitrary for many States and can be discriminatory. The arbitrary definition can contribute to persistent gaps in data and policy responses to the protection and promotion of the rights of older persons.

There is also a need to increasingly apply intersectional analyses to acknowledge and address multiple layers of discrimination. Certain groups of older persons face more barriers arising from the intersection of age with gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, culture, language, and socio-economic status. [An intersectional approach acknowledges the complexity of the discrimination that older persons experience, and takes into account the multiple and compounded disadvantages and inequalities they experienced over their life course.]

As the pandemic affects older persons differently, this approach identifies those most at risk and prevents blanket measures that may result to more harm and discrimination. [Interventions seeking to promote the welfare of older persons must be mindful of their heterogeneity and carefully take these differential conditions into account when designing programs and policies for them. The Government, as duty-
bearers, must ensure that they apply an intersectional approach in their work on the protection and promotion of the rights of older persons.]
Data on the rights of older persons should be made visible in reporting on the gains and challenges towards attaining the SDGs.

The rights of older persons should be taken into account by policy-makers, not only in relation to their right to health and right to social protection but also on rights affecting all aspects of their lives – including access to justice, poverty alleviation, food security, gender equality, and inclusive education, among others.

The data and information representing the experiences of older persons must be included and made visible, regardless of the proportion to the whole population, in government reporting on the SDGs. This is particularly important as the SDGs provide a holistic approach to achieving sustainable development for all.

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International human rights laws play an important role in shaping national laws, policies, programs, services, and attitudes that affect the lives of older persons. Norms and standards set forth by international instruments, when translated to domestic laws and policies, serve to benefit the populace that they target such as women, children, migrant workers and members of their families, and persons with disabilities.

There are normative, implementation, information, and monitoring gaps in the international human rights system. One of the most pressing needs in building forward better from the experience during this pandemic is the need to address these gaps in the international human rights system.

The best way to address these gaps is through the adoption of a convention within the UN human rights system that defines the specific rights of older persons and the corresponding obligations of duty-bearers, taking into account their fixed realities and specific contexts brought about by advanced age. Such a binding instrument provides clear baselines, standards, and norms that serve to guide the crafting of better policies, laws, and services at the national level.

A treaty also creates monitoring, reporting, and accountability mechanisms at the national and international levels. It facilitates the allocation of budget at the national level and the assignment of specific government agencies or units that will focus on the work to ensure the respect, protection, and fulfillment of the rights of older persons.

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A convention also recognizes older persons as persons, not just persons as having “other status” – the catch all ground in the right to be free from discrimination. Older Persons have not been duly recognized as such in the International Human Rights regime. They are Older Persons, human beings who have been systematically disadvantaged, discriminated, disempowered because of ageist beliefs and practices existing prior to Covid-19 but made more visible in the response to the pandemic.

A binding instrument is the best evidence of building forward better, the community of states must create an enabling environment by forging international and intergenerational solidarity for this vital segment of society to be universally recognized in all their diversity, to set the standards for participation in the crafting and implementation of post-Covid recovery programs tapping on all dimensions of their autonomy and independence.
This brings to life the human rights-based approach in addressing the situation of older persons in a post-Covid world, our next normal. It exacts accountability from duty-bearers, while at the same time transforming older persons not just as mere recipients, but rather rightsholders who are empowered and included in the human rights and development discourse.
This is why we need a binding instrument --- A Convention on the Rights of Older persons. It is essential, it is existential -- to ensure that Older Persons are recognized as such and their full potential as human beings is realized all throughout the life course.
VISION: A just and humane Philippine society of persons equal in opportunity, living a life of dignity, and forever vigilant against abuses and oppression.

MISSION: As conscience of government and the people, we seek truth in human rights issues. As beacon of truth, we make people aware of their rights, and guide government and society towards actions that respect the rights of all, particularly those who cannot defend themselves—the disadvantaged, marginalized, and vulnerable.