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**Remarks by  
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AGING  
PROMOTING THE SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF OLDER PERSONS**

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Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to start by thanking AARP, the organizers and sponsors of this Briefing Series, now in its fourth year.

My Department, which houses the programme on ageing, is pleased to be co-sponsoring the event again this year.

The programme has had a relationship with AARP spanning many years. We appreciate AARP's commitment in support of the work of the United Nations, and in highlighting the issues of older persons at the global level.

AARP's engagement is an excellent example of civil society's contributions to the work of the UN.

Ageing is a theme close to my heart. China is home to the world's largest population of persons aged 60 years and older. In 2009 there were 167 million

older persons in China — equivalent to about half the total population of the United States. In just 40 years, this population group is projected to increase by 175 per cent – and will comprise almost one third of China’s population.

We have a saying in China to describe this situation –“□□□□” that we will get old before we get rich. In a significant way, this unique situation says a lot about the success of China’s social policy. Thanks to targeted social protection, China has achieved life expectancy comparable to that of a high-income economy.

But this progress also poses some unique challenges.

First, there is the challenge of “readiness”. While we celebrate the success of social protection, our society is not yet fully prepared for the aging population, for the increasing demands on health infrastructure, on specialized long-term care facilities, and on specially trained social workers and health care workers.

This challenge mirrors the challenge facing many other countries with sizable ageing populations, both developed and developing. This is a truly global phenomenon.

Another consequence of an ageing society is the tremendous change in family structures. With fewer children, families cannot be relied upon to care for older family members in the same way as before. For instance, as a result of the one-child policy, China is now facing a huge dilemma, of one child taking care of two parents and four grandparents.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The changing demographic landscape, not just in China, but globally, requires a total rethinking of the way people are viewed by society as they age. This is perhaps a much more critical challenge in terms of our societal “readiness”.

We all agree that the perspective that one suddenly becomes “old” and unproductive at the age of 60, must change.

What a silly idea!

I can tell you, I don’t consider myself old, and I am certainly not unproductive!

So, we need a fundamental rethink of our public policy. Even as we get ready and improve long-term care facilities for an aging society, we should find creative ways to continue to tap into this tremendous fountain of human wisdom, knowledge and inspiration.

This brings me to the theme of this session of the Commission for Social Development: Promoting social integration.

Social Integration, in the broadest terms, is an inclusive societal goal. It implies greater – not lesser – opportunities for all segments of society.

When older persons are included in decision-making processes, the benefits are far-reaching, and extend to families, local communities and the society at large.

In contrast, when older persons are neglected, and left out of the political process, it is a setback for all.

In employment, when older employees are let go first, it is often justified on business grounds. However, it is a business decision fraught with social implications. Where is our cherished sense of loyalty, commitment and social justice?

Particularly in the case of older persons, we are now witnessing increasing incidence of poverty among them – poverty stemming in part from exclusion, discrimination and disempowerment – issues that lie at the heart of social integration and the Madrid Plan of Action.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Stepping up our efforts to implement the Madrid Plan of Action is therefore more urgent than ever before.

The Madrid Plan of Action inspires hope and confidence. It proves that societies can come together to work toward common goals.

Notwithstanding the gaps in implementation, I feel heartened by the commitment and action taken by governments and stakeholders.

More and more countries are developing national plans of action on ageing.

We have seen expansion of non-contributory pensions in developing countries and proof of their affordability for governments.

We have seen greater recognition that social protection is a good investment for the development of families and societies – and not just a charitable hand-out.

Even amid the financial and economic crisis, we have seen greater recognition by governments of the value and contributions of older workers.

Looking ahead, I remain sanguine. I am hopeful. The tenth anniversary of the Madrid Plan of Action is two years away. It should serve as a catalyst to chart new avenues to more fully implement the Plan of Action and address the barriers to inclusion that older persons currently face.

I encourage AARP to stay engaged and to continue the Briefing Series as we prepare for Madrid+10.

I wish you fruitful discussions over the next two days.

Thank you.

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