

Ms. Lisa Paus, Federal Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth of Germany

Thank you Ms. Whitman,

It's been a pleasure for me to come to Rome to this UNECE ministerial marking the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of MIPAA and of the adoption of the Regional Implementation Strategy in Berlin.

Demographic change and ageing societies are major trends in our societies, in the UNECE region as well as in the entire world.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brutally laid open the need for rights based politics. The virus has threatened older persons livelihood and has negative effects on their entire life, health and well-being, and these effects still linger on, the pandemic not being over yet.

However, we can and need to discuss about lessons learned from this pandemic and join forces for solidarity and equal opportunities throughout life, including to ensure a healthy ageing.

For me – not being a minister for health – I'd like to draw attention to five points beyond the mere health sphere that can be learned and that we need to work on in the next couple of years:

- Firstly: Loneliness, including among older persons, has increased during the pandemic.
- Secondly: The field of care and home care must be further developed.
- Thirdly: Digitalization is absolutely necessary, also for older persons – so no one is left behind.
- Fourthly: Intergenerational solidarity was an important component of the pandemic and is a key to social cohesion
- And last but not least: Human rights and the rights of older persons must be ensured in all spheres and all ages of life.

And I am glad that all these topics are part of the Ministerial Declaration that will be adopted later on and that will set the benchmark for our work in the next review circle.

Let me now elaborate a bit:

### Loneliness:

Never before in history have people worldwide been connected as much and as well to each other as today. Yet, never before so many persons have felt lonely. Loneliness has a negative impact on the well-being.

But not only older persons – also lots of young people report to feel lonely.

So loneliness affects the “older persons of the future” and demonstrates how important a life-cycle approach in ageing policies is. And my portfolio states that I am the Minister for all ages and I am well aware of the influence of loneliness on the different age groups and society. This is a topic we need to continue working at.

Three days ago, we held a conference in Berlin dedicated to this topic and discussing – from a national as well as from an international perspective, what is needed and should be done to improve the situation of lonely persons.

Nationally I have a mandate from the coalition agreement of the German government to develop a strategy against loneliness.

The focus should be on preventing and combating the social dimensions of loneliness and thus strengthening social cohesion. We will be working on that task in the next couple of years, but it is too early to present you results today as the strategy against loneliness is not developed yet. But we built upon already existing programs on loneliness amongst them the “competence network loneliness”. I am glad that we are funded in this area by means from the European Social Fund.

### Care sector

Many States, including my own country, Germany, have a lack of professional care workers. Home care, mostly done by relatives and informal carers, is the form of care given to the vast majority of people who need to have long-term-care in Germany.

However, we should not just take such “informal care” work for granted. It’s a huge burden for the carers who often have to combine work, family and care. It’s a permanent stress situation: Day by day – but also night by night. They do this with passion

and love. Looking after the persons in need, supporting them – no matter what special task is given to them: be it dementia, be it a disability, be it physical problems or be it a palliative situation for example.

And before I am going to continue I'd like to express my deepest gratitude to all the formal and informal carers. Thank you very much for all you do!

[short Pause]

And, dear colleagues, we know: Most of these carers are women. They reduce their amount of work or even stop working to be able to care for the family members. This means the gender pay gap may become a gender pension gap. So, speaking about the informal care sector also means speaking about gender equality. The coalition parties have agreed on measures giving more time sovereignty to informal carers and introduce an substitute for lost income, apart for acknowledgement of care periods in the pension system.

### Digitalization:

Another important topic and lesson learned from COVID-19 is the field of digitalization and also the accessibility to digital solutions. I also see a linkage here to the point of loneliness I've talked about earlier – but also to social services and participation in all spheres of life.

The best services are useless if people have not access to digitalization, to the devices to the necessary skills, and also the infrastructure. I am deeply convinced that the aspect of lifelong-learning should not only cover formal – but also informal parts of learning so needed for skills development in the field of digitalization and continuing full participation in life. .

We established the „Digital Pact for Old Age“ to connect the different levels of government, business, science and civil society to raise awareness among older persons of the potential and opportunities offered by digitalization. And we have set up formats like the “digital angels” offering low threshold support for everyone.

### Intergenerational solidarity

This brings me to the next topic: Intergenerational Solidarity. Societies are built on the base of solidarity and cohesion between the generations. We should neither forget the youngest generation – who suffered from the negative impacts of COVID-19 as well – but in a different way – nor the older generation. And of course, not the generations in between them. Understanding of each other's wishes and needs strengthens our societies and reduces ageism in all its forms. This is what we promote in Germany with the more than 530 "Multi-generation houses", financially supported in a federal program.

### Rights of older persons

COVID-19 has once again impressively demonstrated how important human rights are. But human rights have no expiration date and last until the very end. Age should never be a reason for decisions about life and death (e.g. triage). These basics of a human rights-centered and person-centered approach in all policies for senior citizens are irrefutable.

MIPAA and RIS have been successful instrument to promote these basics – in our region as well as worldwide. However, we all know that there have been and still are situations – even in our region – that tackled human rights of older persons as well. And MIPAA/RIS could not stop such human rights violations. Human rights are one of the cornerstones of the Federal Governments international policy on ageing as well as our foreign policy. Therefore, I also support the work of the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing in New York and the discussions to identify possible gaps and how best to address them.

To make it very clear: Germany supports the further implementation of MIPAA and RIS, as well as of the Ministerial Declaration we are going to adopt later the day.

The last 20 years and the COVID-19 pandemic have demonstrated that policy approaches are an important part for policy makers, but not the only one. They should, and this is my opinion, go hand in hand with the application or, if needed, drafting of adequate international legally binding instruments.

End:

Only international cooperation will bring us forward in the five areas I have elaborated on.

I hope this UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing will inspire us to join forces for solidarity and equal opportunities throughout life to leave no one behind and reach the goal of a sustainable world for all ages.

Thank you very much for your attention