Congratulatory Remarks by H.E. Michael REITERER, EU Ambassador to the Republic of Korea, at 2nd ASEM Conference on Global Ageing and Human Rights of Older Persons
Mr Prime Minister, ministers, distinguished guests.

Let me begin by expressing my sincere congratulations on this Conference and my gratitude to the National Human Rights Commission of the Republic of Korea for organising again the ASEM Conference on Global Ageing and Human Rights of Older Persons after last year's successful hosting.

This ASEM Conference is for all of us a timely opportunity to deal with common challenges. While an ageing population is a cause for celebration – in the case of Korea it is largely synonymous with a longer life expectancy and the result of healthier living conditions, economic development and progress in medicine - rapid ageing could turn into a cause of concern if not dealt with properly by a society. At the individual level, it poses a new set of challenges on how to maintain a meaningful life,
which is often linked to keeping a workplace, health, having access to medical and long term care. Respectful treatment especially in the case of dementia, the Alzheimer disease, a scourge of ageing, is a quickly growing problem which needs to be addressed urgently.

In the European Union, we dedicated the year 2012 as the "European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations". This led to thousands of new initiatives and events at the European, national, regional and local levels, and created political momentum to introduce new policy initiatives. Member States have set their priorities in line with the challenges they are facing. Some have focused on promoting employment among older people, while others have concentrated on social participation, life-long learning and living independently as long as possible. Perhaps most importantly, the “European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations” has largely contributed to changing our perception of older people and their place in the economy and society, strengthened inter-generational solidarity and spread the concept of ‘active ageing’ widely.

Active ageing is a concept that is also linked to the workplace. Many people wish to stay in work even after they have reached the pension age, though not necessarily full time. However, sometimes stagnant economic growth is not conducive to maintain the aged in the work force; often they have become too expensive. Thus, active ageing requires the creation of specific jobs, in order not to strain inter-generational solidarity in putting the young and old in conflict on the labour market. It is also needs better support systems, such as adequate medical care and programmes designed to prevent the social exclusion of the elderly.

Beyond the work place, active pensioners are an important economic factor, enjoying their third career, IF they can afford it. Conversely, poverty of aged persons can threaten their dignity. We also have to recognise that not all of those who work after their retirement choose to do so voluntarily, but are obliged to earn their living, even at the cost of personal hardship.

It is a vast agenda to which all levels of government, businesses, academia and civil society must contribute. In the European Union, the main policy instruments are in the hands of policymakers of the Member States, taking into account national culture and habits. In addition, the European Union also has an important role to play in mobilizing a wide range of policy instruments to support Member States and other stakeholders in their efforts. In the session tomorrow, you will hear more about our policies and activities, within the EU and beyond, but especially what we do in the European institutions to support older staff.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Knowing that by 2030 more than 20% of the world population will be over 65 and given the continuous transition from an aging to aged society, dealing with the mentioned challenges has become a MUST for all societies and the ASEM community to allow aging in dignity.
Today and tomorrow, we will be able to think about what we can do to make active ageing a reality and to inspire more concrete ways to promote the human rights of older persons, thereby ensuring a step closer to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. I look forward to learning about commitments and innovative ideas of participants from Asia and Europe in order to learn from each other's experience and culture, a prime goal of ASEM.

I wish you a very successful conference!

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