Open-ended Working Group on Ageing
14 July 2015

Item 4 – Existing international framework on the human rights of older persons and identification of existing gaps at the international level

Chair,

The Australia recognizes the importance of promoting and protecting the rights of older persons and is committed to doing so. Australia has a range of laws, policies and programs in place to actively promote and protect these rights. I would like to highlight some of these key measures today.

Like many countries around the world, Australia’s population is ageing and this trend is predicted to continue. Over the next 40 years, the proportion of the population over 65 years is projected to almost double to around 25 per cent.
The Australian Government continues to take important steps to prepare for the future, to ensure we are well placed to address the demographic changes, and to ensure that the human rights of all Australians are protected as they age.

Australia’s Age Discrimination Act prohibits age discrimination in areas of public life, including accommodation, education, employment, and the provision of goods, services and facilities. Our states and territories also have their own anti-discrimination laws that prohibit discrimination on the basis of age.

Australia’s first statutory Age Discrimination Commissioner, the Hon Susan Ryan, was appointed in 2011 for a five year term. As Age Discrimination Commissioner, Ms. Ryan is responsible for raising awareness and monitoring and advocating for the elimination of age discrimination across all areas of public life.

The Australian Government recently asked Ms. Ryan, on behalf of the Australian Human Rights Commission, to conduct an inquiry into practices, attitudes and Commonwealth laws that affect the equal participation in employment of older Australians and those with a disability.
Chair,

The Australian Government is committed to helping older workers to enter and remain connected to the workforce. In June 2015 the Government announced the appointment of Australia’s first Ambassador for Mature Age Employment. In this role, the new Ambassador will help drive greater awareness amongst employers of the business benefits of hiring older workers and help open new doors for job seekers.

This appointment builds on the Government’s incentive for employers and mature age job seekers through providing a $10,000 Restart Wage Subsidy. Restart offers support to employers who employ and retain eligible job seekers who are 50 years of age or older, and who have been unemployed and on income support for six months or more. Restart has, thus far, assisted over 1,600 mature aged job seekers return to the workforce.

Chair,

Australia recognises the importance of discussions about a universal approach to the promotion and protection of the human rights of older
people. We acknowledge that there are a range of views on the promotion and protection of the rights of older people, including the proposal to develop a new international agreement.

Australia is of the view that the rights and freedoms of older people are appropriately protected by existing United Nations human rights treaties. However, we consider that existing UN reporting mechanisms could give further prominence to the implementation of obligations with respect to older persons, for example, through greater articulation in General Comments and Recommendations.

As we enter the final negotiations for the Post-2015 development agenda next week, we remain committed to the principle of leaving no one behind. This means that we must ensure that our efforts to achieve sustainable development take into account all people of all ages. Key to this will be ensuring that relevant indicators are disaggregated by age.

Australia is interested to learn from contributions to this session of the Working Group about practical domestic and international approaches to better implementing, protecting and promoting the rights of older people and
about how to ensure that we are responsive to the needs and contributions of older people as we implement the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

The Australian Government has and will continue to take steps in the protection and promotion of the rights of older persons.