Canada’s statement at the opening of the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing – July 2015

- Merci monsieur le president.

- Canada is pleased to participate in this sixth session of the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing. We would like to express our thanks to you Mr. Chair, the Bureau, and the Secretariat for their efforts in preparing a thoughtful and timely agenda. We sincerely welcome this opportunity to share ideas and perspectives and exchange valuable knowledge and experiences, with member States, experts and civil society to improve the human rights of older persons.

- Today, Canada will speak to three main areas including:
  - the progress being made in promoting and protecting the human rights of older persons;
  - briefly touching on the programs and policies Canada has in place for its seniors; and
  - the role of the international community and what it can and must do for older persons worldwide.

- Canada has actively participated in every session of this working group. We look forward to continuing our engagement during this session of the Open-ended Working Group. We continue to promote the human rights of older persons through both domestic measures and the UN system. Canada also remains committed to helping older women and men maintain a high quality of life, be active members of their communities, and ensure their well-being and safety.

- We would like to recognize the tremendous progress that has been made by the UN in recent years in promoting the human rights of older persons. These rights are being raised often in a number of UN resolutions, as well as through relevant international instruments and the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA).
While this progress is encouraging, we are still far from reaching our shared goals. Canada believes that tangible actions are necessary to address persistent gaps in information, data, knowledge, implementation and monitoring. To this end, we encourage this Working Group to continue to engage treaty bodies, independent experts, civil society and other stakeholders within the existing international legal framework to more effectively advocate for the human rights of older persons. In particular, we welcome the role of the Independent Expert on the Enjoyment of All Human Rights by Older Persons and appreciate that the implementation of existing international instruments with regard to older persons is included in the Independent Expert’s mandate.

Canada, like others here today, has a population which is growing increasingly older. The percentage of the Canadian population over the age of 65 is projected to rise to 24% (or about one in four) by 2036. The Government of Canada continues to implement and examine measures to support economic prosperity and the well-being of seniors by maximizing labour market participation, ensuring the sustainability of seniors’ social security programs, and anticipating broad challenges related to population ageing. Canada also remains committed to supporting seniors lead healthy, productive, and rewarding lives by delivering programs and initiatives to develop innovative care support systems, promote healthy ageing and help prevent and manage chronic diseases and conditions.

We believe that immediate steps and actions are required, not only to assist older persons presently, but to prepare for the demographic pressures that we will face over the longer-term in Canada and around the world.

Looking at the broader picture, it is the international community’s responsibility to ensure that the human rights of older persons are included in the international agenda, which is also an excellent way of keeping the human rights of older persons on national agendas.
Mr. Chair, I would like to recall what Canada and other delegations have emphasised in previous meetings that it is important to reflect that human rights are inclusive, indivisible and interdependent, and that no human right guaranteed by international treaty is subject to an expiry date based on a person’s age. Human rights belong to and are to be enjoyed by all human beings without distinction of any kind. On this front, Canada firmly believes that the human rights of older persons must be ensured. In other words, human rights belong to everyone wherever they are because they are human beings endowed with dignity. Governments must therefore fully commit to their responsibility to uphold existing human rights, including the human rights of vulnerable seniors such as women and seniors with disabilities.

We therefore maintain that, although it is important to discuss the implementation of human rights and protection gaps for older persons, the option of a new international convention on the human rights of older persons is not currently supported by a broad consensus of Member States for several reasons, including:
- new conventions are to be reserved solely for the resolution of obvious and significant gaps in the human rights system;
- the desire to dedicate resources to the implementation of the human rights of older persons rather than to the lengthy negotiation of a document;
- a new Convention will likely lead to duplication of work being done by treaty bodies; and
- concerns that a new convention would apply more pressure on a monitoring system that is already overburdened.
• Our efforts and resources should therefore focus on strengthening and better utilizing existing mechanisms in place, such as the Universal Periodic Review, and building on the existing review mechanisms through which Member States can enhance their implementation of human rights for older persons. We would like to take this opportunity to urge all relevant actors to fully implement the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing at the national, regional and international levels. Moreover, we believe that opportunities exist within the UN system, such as the Division for Social Policy and Development, the Commission of Social Development and other functional commissions to work horizontally to mainstream ageing issues.

• For example, Canada would support further efforts to coordinate with the Commission on Status of Women, the Commission on Population and Development, the Commission on Statistics, and the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. As countries begin to implement the Post-2015 Development Agenda next year, the availability of age-disaggregated data will be important for tracking progress across all age groups, notably older persons.

• Mr. Chair, like many Member States, Canada welcomes the opportunity to further dialogue, and exchange best practices and challenges that we all face on different levels. Real progress will only be achieved through the inclusion of all stakeholders including civil society, who are close to the issues that affect older persons, their communities and the support networks that can improve their living conditions. Member States’ governments must also improve their policies and programs, which are the most effective tools we have for making real improvements.

• In this vein, we were happy to see you, Mr. Chair, take the initiative to collect best practices from Member States to enhance and contribute to the work of this Working Group. Canada’s contribution has been finalized and should be made available soon.
Concretely, to address the many challenges faced by older persons, the Government of Canada has in place various policies and programmes, to ensure the protection of the rights of Older Persons. As an example, to mark the 10th anniversary of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, the Government of Canada with HelpAge Canada, has provided funding for the New Horizons for Seniors Program: See Your Citizens project. Under this project, HelpAge Canada will support the social participation and inclusion of seniors by raising awareness of the issues of ageism and stereotyping amongst generations. In addition, Canada jointly co-sponsored a side event on elder abuse, particularly violence against older women in commemoration of the World Elder Abuse Awareness Day in Geneva on June 15.

Mr. Chair, we are pleased to be here, taking part in these discussions. The well-being, safety and security of seniors are a priority for Canada. Over the course of the next three days, we look forward to learning from other Member States and their best practices with respect to the promotion and protection of older persons including; Ageing in Place; how to strengthen the human rights of older persons through the MIPAA; prevention of elder abuse including violence against —especially sexual and gender-based violence—against older persons.

Merci monsieur le président, et je vous remercie pour votre attention.