***Delegation from Represented by***

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***Position Paper for the General Assembly Third Committee***

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYRM) has always been committed to strengthening the rights of its people and eliminating discrimination wherever it is possible. The FYRM therefore underlines the importance of the following issues: I. Improving Coordination in Humanitarian Response to Natural Disasters and Other Emergencies; II. Preventing Violence and Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity; and III. Promoting Rights and Strengthening Protections for Older Persons.

**I. Improving Coordination in Humanitarian Response to Natural Disasters and Other Emergencies**

Most of the natural disasters affecting the FYRM are hydrometeorology, weather and climate conditions. The FYRM faces problems with droughts, winds and storms, heavy rains, river and city floods, flash floods, landslides, wild fires and extreme temperatures. 44% of all the natural hazards in the FYRM are flooding. It has been especially damaging to the agricultural, the water management, forestry and the tourism sectors. Extreme temperatures, due to Mediterranean, continental and mountainous climates in the country, cause the FYRM to experience very hot and dry summers and cold winters, which elevate the mortality rate during these periods. **Nationally** the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning of the FYRM has strengthened the national and local capacities on dealing with disasters and climate risks by identifying gaps and establishing priorities and recommendations for national climate risk management strategies. With the cooperation of the *United Nations Development Programme* and the *Crisis Management Centre* an early recovery plan could be instated. The FYRM works with technologies for early warning systems, such as weather radars for flood forecasting and short term weather forecasting and satellite data for weather forecasting. Even though these technologies exist, it is critical to upgrade and modernize the outdated forecasting systems and the information exchange network. Firstly, the FYRM emphasizes the importance of the **international** cluster coordination in humanitarian response. On this account, the FYRM encourages all Member States and humanitarian organizations, especially local NGOs such as *El hilal* and the *Macedonian Center for International Cooperation* in the FYRM, to work with and provide knowledge and leadership during disasters. Those are the key distributors especially in regions with limited access. The FYRM considers the *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030*, which was endorsed in the General Assembly as resolution 69/283, to be a fundamental concept on managing a strong humanitarian response, especially I. 14. of the *Sendai Framework*, which focuses on the preparation for future disasters by monitoring and understanding the existing challenges. A good example for connecting and networking is *The European Multi-Purpose Meteorological Awareness (EMMA) Programme*. For flood risk reduction the technology to forecast flooding needs to improve in many countries such as the FYRM. All countries should have the resources to improve their forecasting accuracy and therefore the FYRM urges all Member States to voluntarily support countries in the most hazardous regions financially. The costs for humanitarian aid after natural disasters will decline as a long term effect. In order to efficiently monitor the hydrological and meteorological disaster risk in simultaneously affected countries the FYRM promotes that the data should be able to be accessed by any country to provide less equipped countries with the data needed. The FYRM encourages the private sector weather companies to improve the current system by providing their data. NGOs and the government institutions need to be linked together and trained to cooperate, rather than having parallel systems. The FYRM calls upon all the Member States to address the root causes of the disasters and crises, such as climate change and population growth, to decrease the need for humanitarian aid.

**II. Preventing Violence and Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity**

Although the FYRM has successfully implemented the anti-discrimination law on “*Prevention and Protection Against Discrimination*” of 8 April 2010, Macedonia currently faces enormous struggles in protecting the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersexual (LGBTI) people. A survey carried out by the National Democratic Institute in 2015 indicates that 66% of the LGBTI people surveyed in Macedonia had been verbally harassed or abused because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. 27% stated that they had even suffered physical violence. Thus, Macedonia is deeply alarmed by the prevalence of homophobic and transphobic attitudes in Macedonia which frequently manifest themselves in violent hate crimes and hate speeches directed at LGBTI individuals and organizations. **Internationally**, Macedonia was one of the first countries in Europe to ratify Protocol 12 of the European Convention of Human Rights which prohibits discrimination in general and also on the grounds of sexual orientation. Furthermore, the FYRM voted in favor of the Resolution Number 32/2 on *“Protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity”*, adopted on 30 June 2016 by the United Nations Human Rights Council. **Nationally**, Macedonia initiated the above-mentioned law on *“Prevention and Protection Against Discrimination”* which prohibits discrimination on various grounds. This indicates Macedonia’s intentions in taking the needed steps in order to adjust its domestic law with its international commitments. However, the law omits explicit mentioning of the impermissible grounds of discrimination due to sexual orientation and gender identity. Therefore, the FYRM sees a strong demand in vigorously enforcing laws against discrimination based on the individual’s sexual orientation or gender identity. Thus, as a **first step**, sexual orientation and gender identity should be explicitly included as protected categories in Articles 9 and 110 in the already enforced anti-discrimination act of the Constitution and in those sections of the Criminal Code that increase penalties for crimes committed on the basis of the individual’s personal characteristics. **Secondly**, greater efforts and human as well as material resources should be committed to ensure that the investigation and prosecution of acts of violence based on the victims’ sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as hate speech which promotes such acts, is undertaken in a more effective and timely way. This should start with the training of investigators and police employees. The FYRM believes that only a victim-centered approach will help in the matter. The attitude of officers and investigators towards victims is vital in ensuring the victim’s cooperation and helping the victim to cope with the emotional effects of the crime, thus increasing the likelihood of justice for the perpetrator. Detectives and officers should therefore not only be evaluated on their “clearance rates” but also on how thoroughly they investigate reported assaults and how well they interact with the victims. **Thirdly**, relevant laws and policies should be altered in order to ensure that transgender individuals have the legal right to conform their identity documents to their actual gender identity as this is vitally important for the enjoyment of their human rights. **Lastly**, Macedonia is convinced that the national health care policies should be adjusted in the way that access to hormonal, surgical and psychological treatments is provided for LGBTI people on the same basis as all other necessary medical treatments. Macedonia will continue its efforts and dedication to eliminate discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and welcomes help and advice from more experienced countries who have successfully dealt with the matter in order to uphold its international commitments.

**III. Promoting Rights and Strengthening Protections for Older Persons**

In Macedonia, the percentage of older persons (age group 60 and over) of the total population is about 18.5%. The elderly dependency ratio, which indicates the ratio of the elderly population per 100 people of working age (age 15-64) is about 17.4%. Whilst both numbers are not the highest in a regional comparison, Macedonia is deeply concerned that a generally growing elderly population could have devastating consequences (e.g. old-age poverty and the decline in economic growth) on the country if the issue is dealt with irresponsibly. A steadily ageing population has its assets and drawbacks. On the one hand, older persons are important and experienced contributors to the development and stability of society. However, on the other hand, older persons often face neglect, abuse, theft and exploitation and their humanitarian needs require special attention at a community and an individual level. Research across the Western Balkan region has shown that there is a prevalence of the perception that older persons are solely passive consumers of services offered by their respective societies and that they are too socially unfit and inert to take part in the decision making processes. **Internationally**, Macedonia appreciatively notices the efforts that have been made, e.g. the *Treaty of Lisbon* which gave binding force to the “Charter of Fundamental Rights” and dedicated Article 25 to the rights of the elderly (2009), the “*Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing*” and lastly the implementation of the “*Political Declaration and Madrid International Plan of Action an Ageing*”, which reminded the international community of the necessity of keeping the needs of people of *all ages* in mind. **Nationally**, the FYRM introduced the “Inkluzivam” network within the “Taking Action on Social Inclusion of Older People” (TASIOP) project, which started in 2016 in five Western Balkan countries. The aim of this program is to strengthen the networks of civil society organizations and to improve their ties to the community in order to facilitate social inclusion of elderly people in local communities and in the society at large. Furthermore, Macedonia enacted major reforms in its pension system in 2005, following the model of the three-pillar system endorsed by the World Bank. To encourage that further actions are taken in order to improve the situation of the elderly and to integrate them better into society, the FYRM recommends as a **first step** the continuation of the relations with the other Western Balkan countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia within TASIOP – designing innovative policies and public services specifically targeted at older persons is now more important than ever and could be significantly facilitated if mutual support was given. **Secondly**, the FYRM suggests the consideration of a gradual retirement scheme allowing older individuals to lower their working hours yet remain in the workforce and pay taxes until a subsequent date. Those aged 60 and over who are interested in gradually cutting back on their working hours with the permission of their employer would then replace the associated loss in income by partially crystallizing their pension funds. Examples of alternative work arrangements that can support the establishment of a phased retirement program include job sharing, telecommuting, casual employment (i.e., working or filling in on an “as needed” basis), flex-time, part-time or seasonal work, reduced work days and work weeks. Employer-provided education on financial planning, health, pension and retirement readiness will give workers the necessary information to make informed decisions about their continued employment.