**Transformation towards sustainable and resilient society for all, 1st December 2017**

**Building Future Societies for All**

***Opening remarks, Amb. Jo Adamson, Chargée d'Affaires a.i., EU Delegation to the United Nations***

May I first thank DESA and the other cosponsors for organising this timely event.

The title of this discussion provides fertile ground for futurologists and those who aspire to making a better world for everybody. A favourite quote from Elon Musk neatly encapsulates the need to think big but also to be realistic and grounded: *"I would like to die on Mars. Just not on impact."*

Thinking big can lead to overlooking the practical, everyday needs of people. The movement towards housing people in ever-higher tower blocks, which began several decades ago in my own country, unwittingly inflicted damage on low-rise communities and, in some cases, spawned crime and urban degradation. Listening to people should be at the core of all strategies to improve built spaces and communities. That means hearing voices from all strands of society – young and old, persons with disabilities, those with and without families.

It is also critical that all players come together in such endeavours. There is a role for the international community, for national and regional governments, the private sector and civil society. The European Union has sought to put in place overarching frameworks, legislation and policies that support our Member States in the realisation of fairer societies. Some examples:

On **disability,** the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 (EDS) aims at empowering persons with disabilities to enjoy their full rights and benefit from participating in society on an equal basis with others. The strategy also aims to achieve an effective implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities *('UNCRPD' or 'the Convention')* by the EU – to note that the CRPD is the first international human rights convention to which the EU itself is a full state party. The Strategy covers eight areas of action: Accessibility, Participation, Equality, Employment, Education and Training, Social Protection, Health and External Action. The EU is also working towards the adoption of a European Accessibility Act, which aims to improve the functioning of the internal market for accessibility-related products and services by removing barriers created by divergent legislation. This will facilitate the work of companies and will bring benefits for disabled and older people.

The EU is at the forefront of efforts to accommodate **ageing** societies. Projections of ageing patterns make this a necessity: by the year 2020, people aged 60 and over will comprise 20% of the EU´s population and by 2070, the proportion of the population over 65 will increase from 19% today to 29%. This should not be seen from the viewpoint of "How do we deal with these burdensome old people". Rather, the EU is placing an emphasis on "active and healthy ageing". This ranges from policies to encourage a "silver workforce" and "silver economy" to support to age-friendly tourism. The EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights expressly enshrines the rights of the elderly - Article 25 reads: "*The Union recognises and respects the rights of the elderly to lead a life of dignity and independence and to participate in social and cultural life*."

Societies that work for all also mean societies where all citizens can contribute without fear of discrimination or worse. The EU is working towards that goal through its comprehensive **anti-discrimination** legislation, policies and funding. We know that progress is still needed, as the vigilance of our national courts, the European Court of Justice, the European Court of Human Rights and the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency attests.

These are just some areas where action is important in endeavours to build future societies for all. I look forward to hearing the diverse perspectives of the panels who will deliberate further on this issue.