**Meeting:**

Seventy-first World Health Assembly (A71/1)

**Agenda Item:**

12.5 Improving access to assistive technology

**Statement:**

I thank the chair for giving HelpAge International the opportunity to make this statement.

As the draft resolution on improving access to assistive technologies states, one billion people currently need assistive technologies and, as populations age and the burden of disease shifts towards non-communicable and chronic diseases, this figure is set to increase rapidly. With this context HelpAge commends the WHO for its work on assistive technologies, particularly the GATE initiative.

HelpAge welcomes the focus in the draft resolution on the priority list of assistive technologies and the alignment this focus provides with the Global Strategy and Action Plan on Ageing and Health, for which the priority list is an indicator. HelpAge would however, caution against too great an emphasis being put on the products themselves. The resolution and WHO’s work in this area must remain person rather than product oriented. From an ageing perspective we see a great diversity among older people, and therefore also great diversity in terms of need for assistive technologies. Efforts towards increasing access to assistive technology must respond to this diversity and the fact that an older person’s needs can change rapidly.

HelpAge welcomes the focus on functional ability in the discussion on assistive technologies, but cautions against an over emphasis on functioning in relation to mobility. Functional ability must be seen in its broader sense, and efforts related to assistive technology must respond to a range of needs, and have at their heart the promotion of autonomy, dignity and independence. We would also like to see a greater emphasis on the environment in the resolution. The effectiveness of many assistive technologies will be largely dependent on an inclusive barrier free environment. We also state the importance of low cost assistive technology that is available to all, including in low and middle income countries.

HelpAge remains committed to supporting WHO and Member States on this issue. Thank you.