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INTERSECTION OF POPULATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS: RIGHTS OF OLDER PERSONS IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

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Intersection of population and human rights: Rights of older persons in the international context

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As the focus of this meeting is on human rights, and the interrelationship between population and the design of policies and programmes to eliminate inequality and the eradication of poverty, it is quite fitting to highlight the particular case of older persons. Population ageing means that older persons represent a significant, and growing share of the world's population, and it is essential for the future of development that the rights of older persons are respected and advanced.

To draw attention to the importance of addressing the rights of older persons, it is useful to begin with a brief demographic overview. This will be followed by a discussion of the need for greater participation and empowerment of older persons in the economic, social and political aspects of their lives, particularly as a way to claim and advance their rights. Next there will be an analysis of some specific forms of empowerment, including in the area of employment opportunities, bringing an end to elder abuse, and mainstreaming ageing issues. The relevance of these matters to the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing adopted at the UN's Second World Assembly on Ageing in 2002 will be a common theme throughout the paper.

I. Demographics

World populations are continuing to age at an accelerated pace, with the median age projected to rise from its current 28 years to 38 years by 2050. The share of the population aged 60 or above is expected to leap from its current one in ten to more than one in five (22 per cent) by 2050. In 2005, there were 672 million older persons, by 2050 that figure will nearly triple to about 2 billion. Overall world population is growing at a rate of 1.2 per cent annually, whereas the population of older persons is growing 2.0 per cent per year, and will increase to a growth rate of 3.1 per cent annually during the period 2010-2015.¹

These changing demographics are also bringing about changes in the perceptions of who is considered an "older person". Although the United Nations definition of an ageing society is a country or region in which people aged 60 or more make up 10 per cent of the total population, many countries are beginning to differentiate between categories of older persons. The fastest growing segment of the older population is those 80 years or older, deemed the "oldest old", with their rate increasing 4.2 per cent annually (compared to 1.2 per cent for the population as a whole). In 2005, the oldest old comprised 12.9 per cent of those over age 60 and 1.3 per cent of total world population, but by 2050 they will constitute 20 per cent of the older population and 4.3 per cent of the world population. Moreover, the number of persons aged 100 years or older is projected to increase an astonishing 15-fold, from about 145,000 in 1999 to 2.2 million by 2050.

Given with expansion of the age distribution among older persons, perhaps some consideration should be given to changing the lower threshold for the definition of an older person. In most developed countries, the statutory retirement age, or the age at which a person becomes eligible for a full government pension, is 65. Moreover, the definition of "working years" used by the International Labour Office is aged 15 to 64. As a result, there is an inherent contradiction in simultaneously categorizing someone aged 60 to 64 as an "older person" and of "working age". Since people are

¹ The following demographic data are drawn from *Population Challenges and Development Goals, United Nations Population Division, 2005*.

continuing to live longer and healthier lives, it would seem reasonable to periodically adjust upward the age range for who is considered an “older person”.

Furthermore, the importance of gender differences in longevity cannot be overlooked. Older women continue to outnumber older men, as the life expectancy for women is higher than that for men. There were 67 million more women than men over the age of 60 in 2005, and the gender gap widens with age. Nearly twice as many women are over age 80 as men, and more than four of five persons aged 100 or more are women. Given that women comprise the majority of older persons, and the bulk of the oldest old, special focus and attention should be given to the concerns and rights of ageing women.

Declining birth rates and rising longevity

The ageing of society is primarily due to declining birth rates. Between 2000 and 2005 there were 84 countries and territories – accounting for 45 per cent of the world’s population – which had fertility rates at or below that needed for population replacement. High fertility and high mortality rates are being replaced by low fertility and low mortality rates. As a result, a number of countries are expected to experience absolute declines in their populations in the coming decades, along with a general ageing of their populations. The UN estimates that 50 countries will have lower populations in 2050 than they have today, with the declines most striking in the countries of the former Soviet Union.

While birth rates continue to decline, longevity continues to increase. Global life expectancy increased 17.9 years for men and 19.7 years for women over the second half of the 20th century to reach an average of 66 years. Contrary to popular perception, much of the increases in life expectancy came from developing regions, not from developed regions. Men from developing countries live an average of 21.4 years longer in 2000-2005 than in 1950-1955, compared to an increase in longevity of just 8.4 years for men from developed regions. Similarly, women from developing regions live an average of 23.2 years longer in 2000-2005 than they did in 1950-1955, compared to an increase in longevity of 10.8 years for women from developed regions. Even in the least developed regions of the world, significant gains in longevity have been achieved, as men and women can expect to live an average of 15 years longer than those 50 years ago.

Regional and economic differences in ageing structures

Due to a combination of differences in fertility rates and life expectancy, population ageing is far more pronounced in certain regions than in others. Whereas one in five Europeans (20.7 percent) is aged 60 or over, only one in 20 Africans (5.2 percent) falls into this age category. By 2050, a similar share of the populations in Asia, Latin America, North America and Oceania will be over age 60, ranging from 23.6 in Asia to 27 percent in North America. Africa and Europe will remain the outliers, however, as 10 percent of Africans will be over age 60 by 2050, compared to 34.5 percent of Europeans. Africa is projected to lag other regions in population ageing, in part due to the impact of HIV/AIDS, while Europe is expected to exceed other regions in the ageing of its population, due largely to the rapid declines in fertility rates.

Although the proportion of older persons in developing regions is currently one in 12, by 2050 that proportion is expected to reach one in five. Thus population ageing is occurring at an accelerated rate in developing countries, giving these countries less time to adapt to these changes. The old age dependency ratio (the ratio of older persons per 100 adults of working age) could double in 50 years

in some developing countries, whereas it took 150 to 200 years for this to occur in developed countries. In developing regions, the number of persons aged 60 or over is expected to increase four-fold from 2000 to 2050, compared to an increase of 1.7 times in developed regions. Likewise, the potential support ratio or old age dependency ratio is projected to triple from 2000 to 2050 in less developed regions, and double in more developed regions.

Convergence in longevity rates

Although inequalities in life expectancies persist across countries, with persons in developed countries experiencing significantly higher life expectancies than those in developing countries, the gap has been narrowing. In 1950-1955, a man in a more developed region could expect to live 23.2 years longer than a man from a less developed region. By 2000-2005, that gap had shrunk to just 10.2 years. That's because life expectancy increased a remarkable 21.4 years for men in developing countries over the second half of the 20th century, compared to an increase of just 8.4 years for men from developed countries.

MEN	1950	2000	Incr. in yrs.	% Diff.
Total	45.3	63.2	17.9	39.5%
Developed	63.5	71.9	8.4	13.2%
Developing	40.3	61.7	21.4	53.1%
Least dev.	35.4	50.1	14.7	41.5%

Source: DESA calculations based on UN Pop. Division data

The same trends exist for women. While women from more developed regions outlived those from less developed regions by an average of 26.5 years in 1950-1955, the difference dropped to 14.1 years by 2000-2005. Life expectancy for women in developing countries increased 23.2 years over the second half of the 20th century, far more than the 10.8 year increase for women from developed countries.

WOMEN	1950	2000	Incr. in yrs.	% Diff.
Total	48.0	67.7	19.7	41.0%
Developed	68.5	79.3	10.8	15.8%
Developing	42.0	65.2	23.2	55.2%
Least dev.	36.8	52.0	15.2	41.3%

Source: DESA calculations based on UN Pop. Division data

Perhaps the big story of population ageing, therefore, is the implications that it will have for developing countries, especially given that the majority of older persons will be from developing countries. Within 30 to 40 years, Asia and Latin America will have more people over age 60 than under age 15. By 2025, Asia will be home to over half of the world's older persons.

Although the longevity gap between developed and developing countries is shrinking, substantial regional differences in ageing patterns still exist. Life expectancy at birth in 2000-2005 ranges from a low of 49.1 years in Africa to a high of 77.6 years in North America – a difference of 28.5 years. The gap is projected to close markedly; however, as projections for 2045-2050 show life expectancy at birth will rise to 65.4 years in Africa and 82.7 years in North America – for a difference of 17.3 years.

Yet it is interesting to note that regional differences in life expectancy begin to evaporate as people become older. Based on worldwide averages, people can expect to live another 19.2 years after reaching age 60, with those in Africa expected to live another 16.3 years after turning 60 and

those in Oceania and North America another 22 years. So it would appear that differences in life expectancy between regions are more a factor of discrepancies in infant and child mortality rates, and less so because of differences in ageing.

In other words, upon reaching 60 years of age, there is little that separates the anticipated life expectancy of a person from the most developed country and someone from the least developed country. Where the inequality becomes evident is in the standard of living, the level of rights, and degree of well-being that older persons from different regions may – or may not – enjoy. These concerns naturally bring the discussion to issues of participation and empowerment and their relation to the rights of older persons.

II. Participation and empowerment²

Empowerment and participation are closely inter-related. In a sense, these two notions in social policy are indivisible: empowering people means promoting opportunities for their participation, while participation requires empowering people to enable them to exercise this human right. Both empowerment and participation can be economic, social, or political. They both are applicable at different levels: from individual to family to community to national and up to global level. People are empowered through participation.

The World Bank sourcebook on empowerment and poverty reduction considers participation, together with inclusion, as one of the four key elements, or principles, of empowerment. These elements include:

- Access to information;
- Inclusion and participation;
- Accountability, which refers to the ability to call public officials, private employers or service providers to account, requiring that they be answerable for their policies, actions and use of funds; and,
- Local organizational capacity.

Each of these four elements of empowerment are closely intertwined and ideally act in synergy.

Participation and empowerment in the area of ageing

The meaning of empowerment in the area of ageing is not principally different from its meaning in other social areas. One of the most succinct definitions was included in the Montreal Declaration of the International Federation on Ageing (IFA): “The empowerment of older persons necessitates their recognition as full participants and equal citizens in society.”³ In this definition, once again, the link between empowerment and participation is clearly established.

Another definition refers to the empowerment of older people as “the ability to make informed choices, exercise influence, make continuing contributions to society, and take advantage of services.” This definition originates from the IFA book entitled “[Empowering Older People: An International Approach](#)” and belongs to IFA leaders and thinkers: Daniel Thursz, Charlotte Nusberg

² This section on Participation and Empowerment is derived from a paper “Empowerment and Participation in Policy Action on Ageing”, prepared by Alexandre Sidorenko, Focal Point, UN Programme on Ageing.

³ IFA, The Montreal Declaration, 1999.

and Johnnie Prater⁴. The authors underscore that empowerment *is vital to the quality of life of older persons and the health of society on the whole if seniors are engaged and involved members of it*. In other words, both the individual well-being of older persons and the development of society can be achieved only if older persons are included as active participants in different spheres of societal life.

Yet the reality is that older persons are often not active participants in society. Among the barriers which preclude the participation of older persons include: poverty; poor health; low educational levels; lack of transportation and access to services; negative stereotypes about ageing; and overt or subtle age discrimination⁵. The goals of empowering older persons are to overcome these numerous barriers and maximize developmental potential and life satisfaction among older persons. How can these be achieved?

Empowerment of older persons entails actions of two sorts: immediate and long-term. The immediate action should include legislative measures to guarantee the basic human rights of older persons and prevent violence and abuse against them. The long-term action should focus on establishing or sustaining positive images of older persons in society.

Rights of older persons

The first and most essential step to empowering older persons should include measures to protect their human rights. In some places, particularly those affected by conflicts, these measures are of emergency nature. Vulnerability of older persons can expose them to the risk of marginalization and violation of their rights. The rights of older persons are at risk of violation in a variety of institutional, community and family settings. In the public domain, older persons may be denied equity in opportunities available to them and in resources allocated to them.

Culture and tradition, combined with ageism and sexism, influence the extent to which older persons are discriminated against in mainstream social, economic, political and community life. Legal and justice systems may fail to protect the rights of older persons in various regions. In its extreme, the denial of human rights of older persons may lead to neglect, violence and abuse.

What can be done to empower older persons in this basic yet vital area of human rights? The answer seems to be obvious: the human rights of older persons have to be guaranteed. The principal measures should include the following⁶:

- Governments should introduce new laws specifically to protect older people.
- Relevant existing criminal and civil laws should explicitly cover the abuse, neglect and exploitation of older people.
- Existing laws on domestic or intra-family violence should be extended to include older people as a group.

As noted in the WHO study on elder abuse⁷, countries around the world are at varying stages in their national and local approaches to the care and protection of older persons. While some countries

⁴ Published by Auburn House Paperback in 1995.

⁵ Daniel Thursz, Charlotte Nusberg and Johnnie Prater "[Empowering Older People: An International Approach](#)", 1995.

⁶ World Report on Violence And Health, WHO 2002

⁷ Missing voices: views of older persons on elder abuse. WHO, 2002.

include elder abuse under their legal statutes and have fully developed systems for reporting and treating cases of abuse, others have a much more limited response.

At the international level, there are no legally binding documents addressing the rights of older persons. Among the milestone documents of the United Nations on human rights are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. None of these documents contains any references to older persons. Meanwhile, one can argue that the universal nature of these documents implicitly recognizes the rights of older members of a society.

Several draft documents specifically addressing the rights of older persons were introduced either formally or as discussion papers to the United Nations legislative and consultative bodies since the establishment of the Organization:

- Declaration of Old Age Rights (Argentina, 1948);
- Declaration on the Rights of Older Persons (IFA and the Dominican Republic, 1991);
- Charter for a Society for All Ages (AARP, 1999)
- Declaration of Interdependence (the Dominican Republic and AARP, 1999).

None of these documents was adopted.

In 1982 the first UN World Assembly on Ageing adopted the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing. The Vienna Plan detailed the measures that should be taken by Member States to safeguard the rights of older persons within the context of the rights proclaimed by the International Covenants on Human Rights.

In 1991 the General Assembly adopted the United Nations Principles for Older Persons which remains the most important international document promoting the rights of older persons in the five areas of independence, participation, care, self-fulfillment, and dignity.

And most recently, in 2002, the Second World Assembly on Ageing adopted the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. The human rights approach is clearly established in the Madrid Plan of Action. The aim of the Plan is to ensure that persons everywhere are able to age with security and dignity and to continue to participate in their societies as citizens with full rights⁸. The first central theme of the Madrid Plan is the full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of all older persons⁹. Another central theme emphasizes the importance of ensuring the full enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, and civil and political rights of persons and the elimination of all forms of violence and discrimination against older persons.

The Madrid Plan states that the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development, is essential for the creation of an inclusive society for all ages in which older persons participate fully and without discrimination and on the basis of equality. Combating discrimination based on age and promoting the dignity of older persons are fundamental to ensuring the respect that older persons deserve. Promoting and protecting all human rights and fundamental freedoms are important in order to achieve a society for all ages.

⁸ MIPAA, paragraph 10

⁹ MIPAA, paragraph 12

Protecting the rights of older persons is the central content of any policy related to ageing and the most important prerequisite of empowerment. However, for the process of empowerment to become sustainable in any society it is necessary to ensure that older persons are recognized and appreciated as valued and welcome members. Unfortunately very often this is not the case and prevailing images of and corresponding attitudes toward older persons are negative.

Current stereotypes about ageing teach us to ignore the old because they are essentially a non-productive group within a society, which places its strongest emphasis upon the roles of economic productivity and independence. Stereotypes influence our behaviour towards the target group. Equally important, they also communicate appropriate forms of behaviour to the target group itself, and a prevailing message addressed to older persons is simple: be invisible! Perhaps the most prominent example of the old age stereotype is what Robert Butler branded as ageism. Ageism is a systematic *stereotyping* and *discrimination* against people because they are old. Sometimes ageism is compared to sexism or racism because it discriminates against all members of a particular group.¹⁰

Changes in the status and role of older persons are a part of more universal and profound social and economic changes in societies, which are caught between the temptations of consumerism and individualism and the departing serenity of traditional society. There is hope, however, that an emerging post-modern, or even post-globalized society would be capable of absorbing and accommodating the best from its predecessors. The Second World Assembly on Ageing in Madrid defined that future ideal society as a society for all ages.

It will not be an exaggeration to state that the entire Madrid Plan, as well as the Political Declaration, promote a new vision of population ageing as both challenge and opportunity¹¹, and a new image of older persons as having the potential to be a powerful basis for future development¹². The empowerment of older persons and the promotion of their full participation are declared the essential elements for active ageing¹³.

A new image of ageing can not be installed at once. Its promotion has to start with providing to older persons a secure and dignified place in society through legal and legislative measures. Respect for the human rights of people of all ages is the most essential foundation of a society for all ages. Simultaneous actions have to focus on promoting inter-generational cohesion and interdependence. These approaches are clearly expressed in the Madrid Plan through its eleven *central themes*, or overarching dimensions.

Positive images of ageing are promoted throughout the recommendations of the entire Madrid Plan. Moreover, one of its eighteen priority issues is directly devoted to images of older persons. The objective formulated under this priority issue calls for the *enhancement of public recognition of the authority, wisdom, productivity and other important contributions of older persons*.

III. Examples of human rights issues raised in the Madrid Plan

The Madrid Plan includes numerous references to human rights and recommendations on how to achieve them for older persons. There are a number of central themes running through the International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002, linked specifically to improving economic and social conditions and enabling older persons to contribute fully and benefit equally from development. Three of these will be specifically addressed in this paper. This is not intended as a comprehensive

¹⁰ Id., *ibid.*

¹¹ Political Declaration, Article 1.

¹² Political Declaration, Article 10.

¹³ Political Declaration, Article 12.

overview of issues related to human rights and ageing, but rather as examples of the breadth of matters dealt with in the Madrid Plan.

The first topic concerns work and employment, either income-generating or voluntary work;¹⁴ and the need to promote a favourable attitude among employers regarding the productive capacity of older workers.¹⁵ The second issue regards neglect, abuse and violence against older persons, with the objective, first of all, to eliminate all forms of neglect, abuse and violence against older persons, and, second, to create support services to address elder abuse.¹⁶ The final issue deals with the need to mainstream ageing issues, and nurture, emphasize and encourage a reciprocal relationship between and among generations through a comprehensive and effective dialogue.¹⁷

Employment and work

An important part of maintaining the active participation of older persons in society and development is through their continued involvement in the paid labour force. Older persons should be able to continue with income-generating work for as long as they want and for as long as they are able to do so productively. To achieve this objective, there is a need to promote a more favourable attitude among employers regarding the productive capacity of older workers, as well as a greater awareness, including self-awareness, of the benefits of maintaining an ageing workforce. To this end, new work arrangements and innovative workplace practices can be developed which help sustain the working capacity and accommodate the needs of workers as they age. It is also important to promote a realistic portrait of older workers' skills and abilities by correcting damaging stereotypes about older workers or job candidates.

Whereas it may be to the benefit of individuals to work longer; in many countries this trend co-exists with a counter trend towards early retirement. Labour shortages are likely to occur in demographically older countries resulting from the decline in the pool of young persons entering the labour market, the ageing workforce and the tendency towards early retirement. To circumvent these shortages, policies to extend employability, such as flexible retirement, new work arrangements, adaptive work environments and vocational rehabilitation for older persons with disabilities are essential. Appropriate adjustments may be needed to the workplace environment and working conditions to ensure that older workers have the skills, health and capacity to remain employed into their later years. At the same time, however, greater effort should be made to provide older persons in developing countries with pensions or other forms of income support so that they have the option to stop working once they reach retirement age, rather than being forced to continue working as their only means of survival.

Overall, demographic and labour force changes will require a new approach to retirement that takes into account the needs of employees as well as employers, in particular by applying the principle of flexible retirement policies and practices, while maintaining acquired pension rights. Possible measures to achieve this goal may include reducing the incentives and pressures for early retirement and removing disincentives to working beyond retirement age, for example, through protecting acquired pension rights, disability benefit rights and health benefits from being affected by delayed retirement age. The notion of retirement is gradually changing such that it now signifies the beginning of a new productive stage, one which combines periods of paid work, leisure and volunteering. Rather than being constrained by full-time work, new work arrangements would allow

¹⁴ The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, paragraph 12

¹⁵ The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, paragraph 21

¹⁶ The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, paragraph 110

¹⁷ The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, paragraph 13

older persons to combine paid employment with other activities – a notion known as “blended retirement”.

Closely related to the issue of employment is the need for ongoing skills development. Particularly in today’s knowledge-based society, policies should be instituted to ensure equality of opportunity throughout a person’s life to continuing education, training, retraining and vocational guidance. A commitment to lifelong learning is essential to ensure the productivity of both individuals and nations. Ensuring that older persons have the possibility to upgrade their skills through access to education and training is also a prerequisite for the active and meaningful participation of older persons in employment. The issue of availability of appropriate funding to pursue this objective is crucial, as it remains important to invest in the education and skill development of people as they age. At the same time, employers should recognize the value of having older workers pass on their experience and skills through providing training to younger and newer employees. A workplace with a diverse age distribution has the potential to create a stimulating environment in which younger and older workers alike can share their skills, knowledge and experience.

The widespread use of technology also necessitates ongoing education and training for older persons so that they don’t face alienation and exclusion from these important aspects of the economy and society. Measures that enable older persons to have access to, take part in and adjust to technological changes should therefore be taken, especially with regard to maintaining their vitality in the workplace and in their communities.

Lifelong learning also involves passing knowledge from one generation to another. Ancient cultural norms, beliefs and customs are often kept alive through an informal system of intergeneration transmission. In indigenous communities, for instance, traditional knowledge about plants and medicines is carried over from one generation to the next. The value and respect attributed to this knowledge represents an important dimension of active ageing.

Neglect, abuse and violence against older persons

Elder abuse has only been recognized and come to public attention in the past two decades. It is increasingly viewed as a human rights issue in as much as mistreatment of older persons violates their fundamental rights. The impact, consequences and costs of elder abuse, violence and neglect to societies and individuals may be considerable and have not been estimated, as a result of a lack of quantifiable data and information.

Political commitment, rights based approaches and legal support are needed to eliminate elder abuse overall. Proponents of the rights of older persons have suggested that the global problem of elder abuse will not be addressed successfully until people's basic needs and rights across the life course are met. The greatest abuse of older individuals may well be failure to provide them with economic means to live in dignity and opportunities to exercise choices. Addressing structural causes of poverty can thus impact older persons' physical and emotional security and sense of wellbeing, and reduce their vulnerability to violence, neglect, exploitation and abandonment.

Older persons' vulnerability to abuse may also be reduced through enabling them to remain active and productive, and to contribute to society, community and family. Societies must therefore be encouraged to create an anti-ageist environment in which older persons' rights to independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity are recognized and realized.

Mainstreaming and intergenerational dialogue

The most effective way to deal with ageing concerns is to see that they are mainstreamed into existing policy priorities, rather than treated as peripheral or marginalized issues. Ageing should be viewed as part of the life course, and not as a condition apart from the rest of society. Older persons can be caretakers, as well as need to be cared for. They can be recipients of benefits (pensions, health care) as well as key contributors to the economy (performing valuable services, both paid and unpaid) and major consumers. Furthermore, it is of critical importance that older persons most affected by exclusion are heard and are able to bring their own perspectives to the discussion for furthering their rights and integration. As the Madrid Plan states, there is also an urgent need for changes in attitudes, policies and practices at all levels and in all sectors so that the enormous potential of ageing in the twenty-first century may be fulfilled.

Before older persons can be fully integrated into the development process, it is essential to change the negative images and perceptions of older persons by younger generations. A balanced and realistic yet positive view of ageing is an integral aspect of the Madrid Plan. Recognition of the experience, wisdom and dignity of older persons has been a cultural norm throughout history. These values and norms, however, have been often neglected. Sometimes older persons are treated and portrayed as a drain on the economy, in view of escalating health care and pension costs. While healthy ageing requires a combination of elements, including appropriate funding at the national level, unjustified criticism has sometimes fostered a negative image of ageing. Images of older persons as attractive, diverse and creative individuals making vital contributions should compete for the public's attention. Older persons also make substantial economic contributions in their capacity as active consumers, earners and care providers; they are not only "recipients" who are taking from the system. Older women are particularly affected by misleading and negative stereotypes that need to be changed. This reinforces exclusionary practices at the local and national levels.

As the population ages, and the number of years separating the young from the old continues to expand, added attention should be paid to strengthening solidarity through equity and reciprocity between generations as called for in the Madrid Plan of Action. Too often, younger and older generations are at odds, with each group competing for government resources and policy attention. Rather than stressing the differences between the ages, greater effort should be made to highlighting their synergies and interdependence. For instance, caring responsibilities often take on an intergenerational dimension, with older persons caring for grandchildren and young adults providing nursing and long-term care for seniors. There is also much that the young and the old can learn from one another.

In order for ageing issues to be mainstreamed into national development policies, governments have to recognize the importance of dealing with ageing issues in an integrated way. For example, pensions are not just a concern of older persons as the current workforce is making contributions to support the retired workers. Any changes to existing pension systems will take time to be implemented, so they will have less of an impact on those who are already retired today, but more so on those who will retire in years to come. Similarly, the community and care work performed by older persons should be recognized and valued, even if they do not receive monetary compensation for these services. Ageing issues will be addressed most effectively when they are viewed from a broader context, one which acknowledges the interrelationship of older persons within the wider community.

IV. Conclusion

Next year the UN will observe the fifth anniversary of the Second World Assembly on Ageing. The United Nations Commission for Social Development decided that during the years 2007 and 2008 the first cycle of the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action would be undertaken. The Commission also decided that the bottom-up participatory approach will be the major format of the review and appraisal exercise.

It should be noted that the bottom-up participatory approach has a dual purpose. The first one is of “technical”, or “methodological”, nature as the participatory approach will be used for in depth evaluation of national efforts to implement the Madrid Plan.

The second purpose of the bottom-up participatory approach is to directly involve older persons in actions on their behalf, thus promoting their participation in the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action. The immediate goal of the participatory approach is to ensure that older persons have an opportunity to express their views on the *impact* of national policy actions affecting their lives. However, the overall goal is to ensure that older persons are involved in *all phases* of policy actions on ageing, including policy design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Therefore, the participatory approach to review and appraisal of the Madrid Plan could be viewed as an *entry point* for engaging older persons in all spheres of the Plan’s implementation. It should not be simply a one-time activity for reporting to national authorities or international bodies. The bottom-up participatory approach should ideally represent an ongoing process of engagement and participation that will be incorporated into the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action.

During the first cycle of the review and appraisal we will have an opportunity to assess the progress of national and international efforts in implementing the Madrid Plan. The assessment should include an important angle of empowerment. It is hardly possible to quantify the empowerment, and this is perhaps not even necessary as the central content of the review and appraisal process is to *involve* older persons, thus *empowering* them through *participation*. This is in full agreement with the aim of the International Plan of Action *to ensure that persons everywhere are able to age with security and dignity and to continue to participate in their societies as citizens with full rights*¹⁸.

V. Recommendations

- Older persons should be full participants in the development process and in society so that their skills, experience, wisdom and knowledge can be put to use for the benefit of all. The impact of population ageing on the socio-economic development of society engenders the need for continuing integration and empowerment of older persons, including the removal of barriers and obstacles which serve to exclude or discriminate against them.
- Organizations of older persons are an important means of enabling participation through advocacy and promotion of multigenerational interactions and the establishment of such organizations should be encouraged in all countries as a means of representing older persons, particularly older women, in decision-making.
- Given that involvement in the paid labour force is an important part of maintaining the active participation of older persons in society and development, people should be encouraged to work for as long as they want and for as long as they are able to do so productively. To this end, employers and older persons alike should recognize the inherent benefits of an ageing work force and efforts should be made to eliminate age barriers in the formal labour market by promoting

¹⁸ The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, paragraph 10

the recruitment of older persons and preventing the onset of disadvantages experienced by ageing workers in employment.

- The notion of retirement is changing, particularly within different cultural contexts. Rather than considering retirement as the ending of a person's active working life, it can now signify the beginning of a new productive stage, one which combines periods of paid work, leisure, volunteering and lifelong learning.
- Eliminating neglect, abuse and violence against older persons will require political commitment, a rights based approach and legal support. Successfully addressing the global problem of elder abuse will also require efforts to reduce poverty and vulnerability and promote social integration so that people's basic needs and rights across the life course are met.
- Creating a society for all ages as envisioned in the Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing requires the mainstreaming of ageing issues into policy planning and implementation. Renewing the intergenerational bond, where young and old are committed to mutual respect, appreciation and support, is key to successful mainstreaming efforts.