

THE UNITED NATIONS SECOND WORLD ASSEMBLY ON AGEING

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The Second World Assembly on Ageing (WAA) was held in Madrid, Spain, from 8 to 12 April 2002. Over 150 states were represented at the Assembly along with a number of United Nations bodies and programmes, specialised and related organisations and intergovernmental organisations. Observer status was granted to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from throughout the world, including international NGOs. The purpose of the WAA was to finalise and adopt a Political Declaration and an International Plan of Action on Ageing.

New Zealand's official delegation to the Second World Assembly on Ageing comprised myself, Jenni Nana, Policy Manager, Ministry of Social Development (Delegation Leader); Christine Bogle, Ambassador, New Zealand Embassy, Madrid; and Deborah Prowse, Second Secretary, New Zealand Embassy, Madrid. Age Concern New Zealand, through Garth Taylor, Chief Executive, and Dr Sally Keeling, researcher, Christchurch, provided New Zealand non-government representation.

The government of Spain hosted the WAA, which was opened by Kofi Anan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Other opening addresses were delivered by Her Royal Highness the Infanta Dona Christina of Spain, Good Will Ambassador to the WAA; and the President of Spain, His Excellency Jose Maria Aznar, who was elected President of the Assembly. The opening ceremony and all plenary sessions, where country delegates delivered their statements, were live webcast and can be viewed on the United Nations web site www.un.org/ageing/coverage.

The work during the WAA was organised into several concurrent sessions each day. The main plenary hall was the venue for the delivery of country statements. A separate Main Committee was established, on which all official delegations were represented, to consider and negotiate the content of the Political Declaration and the International Plan of Action on Ageing.

To facilitate progress on the draft documents, particularly where there were clauses or sections where common agreement was problematic, sub-committees were established. They were charged with negotiating issues of concerns to reach a consensus between differing viewpoints, and reporting back to the Main Committee. Alongside the Main Committee, "country group" meetings were held to discuss and reach agreement

within the group on issues of common concern, primarily relating to proposed text in the documents under negotiation.

In addition to these formal United Nations meetings, there was a programme of side events to discuss the wide range of issues relevant to ageing and the ageing population in both developed and developing nations. These included sessions by researchers and national government, inter-government and non-government organisations. There were continuing opportunities throughout each day for informal meetings and networking, as well as reviewing and obtaining relevant literature and information provided by the United Nations, member states and NGOs. Further opportunities for information sharing and networking were organised by various countries or organisations during or following the end of the formal sessions.

PLENARY SESSIONS – KEY THEMES

The plenary sessions provided the opportunity for a general exchange of views, through addresses from member states and from selected international NGOs. In the main, statements provided information about the particular situation of the ageing population within individual member states, identified issues of particular concern or interest, and gave expressions of support for the International Plan of Action on Ageing. There were a number of recurring themes in the issues identified in the statements from country groups.

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict received a high level of attention, particularly in the statements delivered by the Arab nations’ delegates. In part this was in response to the fact that, with the presence of the Secretary-General, much of the United Nations infrastructure was operating from Madrid. For example, Kofi Anan’s meetings with United States Secretary of State Colin Powell and other emissaries to discuss responses to the conflict situation were held in Madrid. The significance of this issue at the WAA reached a critical level on the final day when rumours circulated among delegates of the intention of the Arab states to table a declaration seeking the WAA’s condemnation of the Israeli occupation of Palestine. In the end, however, the Arab declaration was not tabled.

The key issue for developing nations, and African nations in particular, is the impact of HIV/AIDS. Two compelling effects in terms of the ageing population are that many older people in these nations are left having to raise the children of those who have died of HIV/AIDS, with some of those children and older people also suffering from HIV/AIDS. The other major concern relates to the fact that almost an entire generation has been decimated by HIV/AIDS, and this is the generation that generally would be expected to be the most economically productive. The human and economic consequences for these nations arising from the HIV/AIDS pandemic highlighted the

importance of international efforts to focus attention on this issue and to provide support to these nations.

One recurrent issue that applied more generally across all nations was the need for continuing research on facets of ageing and the implications of an ageing population. Impetus for action was provided in the statement from the International Association of Gerontology. This statement outlined a research agenda for action that had been developed at the global scientific meeting held in Valencia in the week immediately preceding the WAA.

In terms of the international plan itself, many statements included appeals for adequate and ongoing monitoring and reporting, to ensure that the actions identified in the plan would be undertaken. There was concern among delegates that all nations needed to be fully committed to achieving the agreed objectives. The United Nations Programme on Ageing, headed by Mr Alexander Sidorenko, was congratulated on the development of the plan and for organising the WAA, regarded by delegates as highly successful.

New Zealand's statement, reproduced below, received positive responses from delegates and United Nations staff. Delegates were interested and sought information on the New Zealand Positive Ageing Strategy and on other relevant policy issues, including superannuation. Official delegates quickly exhausted copies of the New Zealand Positive Ageing Strategy and the Status report, which were made available at the WAA. Feedback and comments received by delegates confirmed New Zealand's position as a leader in positive ageing policy.

DECLARATION AND INTERNATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION ON AGEING

The Political Declaration and International Plan of Action on Ageing were agreed and adopted on the last day of the WAA. The effect of the declaration and plan is to confirm an international commitment to respond to the opportunities and challenges of an ageing population and accept a moral obligation to strive for agreed objectives. Monitoring progress towards implementing the objectives outlined in the International Plan of Action on Ageing will require member states to report to the United Nations from time to time, outlining developments within their own countries. Publication of these reports reinforces the moral obligation on member states to ensure appropriate actions are taken.

The plan is intended to be a practical tool to help policy makers to focus on the key priorities associated with individual and population ageing. It addresses a wide range of issues, with implications for the lives of older people around the world, including modernisation, rural development, urbanisation, labour, education, income/pensions,

health, nutrition, training of carers, housing, infrastructure, and images of ageing. Objectives have been developed under each issue, with recommended actions to achieve the objectives.

The first draft of the International Plan of Action on Ageing 2002 was circulated to member states for comment in August 2001. Negotiations on the draft plan had been ongoing since December 2001, in a series of preparatory meetings at the United Nations in New York. The Ministry of Social Development, in consultation with the Senior Citizens Unit and other relevant agencies, worked with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade to provide input from New Zealand and to monitor developments.

New Zealand's input to the international plan focused on ensuring that:

- the proposed actions are in line with New Zealand policy directions identified in the New Zealand Positive Ageing Strategy and other policy decisions;
- the proposed actions support New Zealand policy on the role of government and other sectors in our society;
- the language used in the plan promotes positive ageing; and
- key areas of policy concern in New Zealand are addressed, including human rights, gender issues, indigenous people, age discrimination, older people in the labour force, pensions, health, disability issues, and development issues.

The final version of the international plan, incorporating minor amendments prior to adoption in Madrid, will shortly be circulated to member states. The plan includes a section on implementation and follow-up, outlining responsibilities for national as well as international action. It states that national governments have the primary responsibility for implementing the broad recommendations of the International Plan of Action 2002, at the same time that there is an obligation for international co-operation. The UN Commission for Social Development will be responsible for follow-up and appraisal of the implementation of the plan, taking into account the different circumstances of member states.

The development of our Positive Ageing Strategy and its associated action plans means that New Zealand is very well placed to make significant contributions in response to the International Plan of Action on Ageing. This view was also evident at the Valencia Forum, at which New Zealand's progress and innovation in developing initiatives to examine and address issues that many other countries are only starting to consider was recognised by overseas researchers and policy makers. It is apparent from both of these forums that New Zealand has a great deal to offer in the international arena of ageing. The challenge for New Zealand is to develop ways to contribute our expertise and experience in the most effective and appropriate way.

NEW ZEALAND STATEMENT TO THE SECOND WORLD ASSEMBLY ON AGEING

E ngā mana, e ngā reo, o ngā hau e wha

Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou nō Aotearoa.

Esteemed people of many languages from the four corners of the earth,
Greetings to you all from New Zealand.

New Zealand Aotearoa is a bicultural Pacific nation comprising just over 3.7 million people, of whom 16% are aged 60 and over. Our relatively small population, and the scale and simplicity of our government structures, means that as a social democratic nation we have often been at the forefront of innovation in terms of social policy.

As with the many nations represented here at this Second World Assembly on Ageing, the older population in New Zealand will change substantially over the next few decades. By 2050, the proportion of older people in our population will have doubled to 32%; a change made more significant by the increase in ethnic and social diversity of the older population.

In the future, New Zealand's older population will have higher proportions of Māori, our indigenous people, as well as Pacific peoples and Asian people, who will all have different needs and expectations. There will be lower proportions of women who have had children and the current gender imbalance at older ages is likely to lessen. Increasingly, older people will be better educated and have more work options at age 65 than previous generations of older people. Older women will be more likely to have had a long employment history, while older men will have experienced greater diversity in their working lives.

The growth in the older population has significant policy implications for all nations throughout the world and we congratulate the United Nations for the timely development of an International Plan on Ageing. In developed nations in particular, much of the debate on the ageing population centres around expected increases in health and retirement income expenditure. However, people in those nations are not just living longer, they are also living healthier and can contribute many more years to society.

The New Zealand Government recognises that there are many opportunities to be realised as future generations of older people are expected to be healthier, more skilled and educated, and remain more active in the workforce than their predecessors. It will become increasingly important to monitor the changing characteristics of this population so that policies for older people can be tailored to enable positive ageing.

The concept of “Positive Ageing” embraces a number of factors including health, financial security, independence, self-fulfilment, community attitudes, personal safety and security, and the physical environment. The underpinning premise is that the years of “older age” should be both viewed and experienced *positively*. The focus is therefore not only on the experience of older individuals, but also on younger generations’ attitudes, expectations, and actions regarding ageing and older people. Promoting positive attitudes to ageing is the first step to achieving this goal.

The ability to age positively is assisted by good investment in education throughout life, to provide individuals with a repertoire of skills and an ability to set and achieve goals. It is also dependent on an environment that provides opportunities for older people to remain involved in society. Positive ageing policies aim to improve each individual’s life experiences and create an environment that offers opportunities for continuing participation.

Positive attitudes to ageing and expectations of continuing productivity challenge the notion that older age is a time of retirement and withdrawal from society. In reality, lifetime experiences contribute to well-being in older age, and older age is a time for ongoing participation in society.

Positive ageing begins at birth, and positive ageing policies are those designed to support people, as they grow older, in leading productive lives in the economy and society. New Zealand supports the emphasis in the International Plan on Ageing of an inclusive society for all ages, where older people are able to fully participate in society on the same basis as all other age groups. Continued participation in older age has benefits for the individual concerned, the community and the country as a whole.

It is important that government policies across the range of issues, including employment, health, housing and income support, allow and encourage older people, and future generations of older people, to experience ageing as a positive and productive phenomenon. My Government has responded by developing a Positive Ageing Strategy to achieve this objective.

In April last year, building on our achievements over the International Year of Older Persons, our Minister for Senior Citizens launched the New Zealand Positive Ageing Strategy. The strategy sets out my Government’s commitment to positive ageing and reaffirms the value of older people in society. The development of the strategy included a review of existing policies and services to ensure consistency with the Positive Ageing Principles. In addition, extensive public consultation was undertaken to identify ten priority goals, with recommended actions to achieve these goals.

All government departments are required to identify work items each year that contribute to the achievement of the priority goals, and to address other emerging issues as they are identified. These work items form annual Positive Ageing Action Plans that are monitored and reported to Government each year. The overall impact of the initiatives will be reviewed every three years, with the publication of regular status reports that provide a comprehensive description of the situation of older people in New Zealand.

The New Zealand Positive Ageing Strategy is therefore a living document that reinforces Government's commitment to promote the value and participation of older people in their communities. Governments cannot achieve this objective on their own. All sectors of society need to be involved, so it is pleasing that non-government sector is playing a significant role in this World Assembly.

The expected growth in the proportion of older people during the coming decades will provide New Zealand with a valuable resource of skills, knowledge and experience to benefit our society. Societies that recognise the value of older people and harness this resource will reap the rewards.

In conclusion, let me quote to you a Māori proverb:

*Haere e wai, i te waewae o ngā kaumātua
Kia ora ai koe*

Wisdom comes to those who sit at the feet of our elders.

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.
(Farewell greeting to you all)