FINAL DECLARATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE WORLD NGO FORUM ON AGEING

“THE DEVELOPMENT AND RIGHTS OF THE ELDERLY”

MADRID, APRIL 5th-9th, 2002
THE DEVELOPMENT AND RIGHTS OF THE ELDERLY

The elderly population in developed countries represents nearly 20% of the entire population and future trends will bring it close to 25%. In the developing and under-developed countries, this figures exceeds 10% and is expected to grow to close to 20% in the coming decades.

Despite this background, in numerous states the elderly suffer from critical situations of poverty and social exclusion, do not enjoy appropriate living conditions and constitute an “invisible” group for governments and international institutions and, in the most developed countries, despite the social advances and improvements achieved so far, they are still afflicted by considerable shortcomings and do not receive the recognition which they deserve on the basis of their population significance.

The Universal Declarations and International Conventions on Human Rights do not include any specific prohibition whatsoever of age discrimination. Nonetheless, this is a situation suffered by old people throughout the world in multiple circumstances: severe economic difficulties, limitations on access to health services, lack of social services, considerable shortcomings in housing and living conditions, exclusion from culture and education, inappropriate treatment, scant participation in social and political life.

The human rights of the elderly are not recognized in many parts of the world. That is why this Forum, as a priority issue, calls for the full and strict application of the Declaration of Human Rights, recalling that it must be enforced for all citizens, regardless of age. The full inclusion of older people in the social and economic life of their respective societies, the putting to use of their capacity and experience and the defence of their rights against any form of discrimination constitute an essential aspiration of the Forum on Ageing.

In addition, the social conquest represented by the fact that many millions of people now reach extreme old age obliges us to provide special respect and protection for certain aspects directly linked with the ageing of the population as part and parcel of the rights of the elderly.

For this reason, we demand, as well as the true acceptance of said rights, that the necessary follow-up and monitoring mechanisms be instituted in order to ensure their enforcement in all spheres: locally, nationally and internationally.
Furthermore, within these guarantee institutions, special attention must be paid to the following aspects:

AGEING AND POVERTY

The living conditions of the elderly in the developing and under-developed countries are currently characterized by the extreme poverty in which they live and which is transmitted to subsequent generations. They are affected by situations of social exclusion, lack of opportunities to participate in development activities, extremely limited access to health care, non-existence or minimal development of pension systems, scarcity in the social service networks, housing that fails to meet minimum conditions of dignity.

The numerous and often silenced conflicts of arms, the spread of diseases such as AIDS, famines and natural disasters have a particular impact on older people.

With their expertise and skills, the elderly contribute to the alleviation of the effects of armed conflicts and humanitarian crises, yet they are not sufficiently recognized and their specific needs are not taken into account by national and international organizations.

Relatives, who have traditionally played a supporting role in aiding the elderly are now also immersed in conditions of poverty and have themselves severe difficulties in adequately fulfilling this role of carers.

Despite their efforts, the associations of older people and NGOs cannot call on the support and recognition of government and multilateral institutions for the development of their programmes and activities.

International finance institutions do not acknowledge the important contribution made by the elderly to the development of their families and communities and so impose conditions on economic aid to these countries such as the implementation of strict cutbacks in the already scantily-funded instruments of social protection. The governments become accomplices or passively acquiesce to these demands.

The requirements of the privatization of Social Security systems imply a source of discrimination for the elderly in developing countries.
The burden of paying foreign debt prevents countries from devoting economic resources to the development of social welfare policies for older groups in the population. Poverty-reduction programmes do not include the elderly, even though the numbers of old people in situations of poverty are increasing.

The United Nations proposal from three decades ago now that developed countries should allocate 0.7% of their GDP to development co-operation programmes is today implemented by only three states. It is also of grave concern that the annual credits announced or committed each year often end up unspent or in a minimal percentage.

The elderly have a great capacity for initiative in organizing themselves into groups and networks, but their lack of awareness of their rights and poor educational level together with situations of poverty and social exclusion prevent these rights from being fulfilled.

GENDER AND AGEING.

Elderly women must be given special protection in order to defend their rights. They suffer from shortfalls in multiple respects: lower income levels, greater disability, more solitude, less access to education, culture and leisure. Their participation in decision-taking processes is still today very limited.

But above all, they take on the tasks of caring for members of their families, even at an advanced age, thus constituting in most of the world's countries the sole source of care provision in situations of illness or disability. The consequences of war, tumults and diseases such as HIV/AIDS have led to the existence of thousands of grandmothers acting as carers and surrogate mothers. Breaches of rights and situations of violence and abuse occur in three discrimination contexts: gender, age and poverty.

The elderly women in developing countries are particularly prone to the effects of this situation, made all the more acute by their greater social exclusion due to a life of gender inequality, their greater longevity in comparison with men and their loneliness through widowhood in a majority of cases.

SOCIAL WELFARE

The ageing of the population implied by the enormous progress in the development of peoples all over the world represents an important
challenge for public policies and social welfare systems in order to allow the elderly to continue to participate for as long as possible in society and to have available services that are affordable, appropriate and adapted to their requirements.

The rights forming the basic pillars of social protection are, among others: the right to a retirement with sufficient income to ensure security and dignity in their remaining life; access to health and social care services ensuring their personal independence and quality of life; social inclusion; effective integration in society.

Families in all their varied formulas continue to be central to the quality of life of older people. The changing patterns in family life as a result of immigration, urbanization, increased numbers of women on the job market and other economic and environmental processes must be taken into account by the authorities in order to provide adequate support resources for families, so that family support complements and does not replace public services.

Governments must assume responsibility for the balance between self-aid, informal support systems and professional care. Long-term care must contemplate a wide range of community, social and health services.

Special attention must be paid to the most fragile and vulnerable members of the elderly population, those in situations of poverty or suffering a situation of dependence.

HEALTH

Ageing must not be synonymous with declining health. Nonetheless, the living conditions of many elderly people and most particularly women contribute to a deterioration in their health. For this reason, health is one of the basic concerns of the elderly.

The undoubted advances in health improvement cannot hide the fact that the elderly do not have access to health care in many places. Many elderly people are discriminated in their right to health protection and cannot enjoy the fruits of scientific advance.

PARTICIPATION

Elderly people are active members of society and make many contributions, often less visible ones. Participation is a key factor for
social development and it is therefore necessary to promote creatively those initiatives that stimulate activity by the elderly in rural and urban settings.

The barriers to participation are many and varied. It is very important to be aware of the perceptions that older people have about their abilities, as well as the information they have with respect to how they can participate.

Insofar as ageing is a process that concerns all generations, the participation of the elderly must contemplate all of the topics of interest to the community, thus applying an inter-generational perspective.

In both developed and developing countries, the elderly have expertise that can be shared with younger generations, thus allowing them to act as the link between the past and the present. They therefore constitute a key resource for giving continuity to cultural values and for preserving the diversity of cultural identities.

SECURITY, CONSUMPTION AND ENVIRONMENT

In order to achieve an active and healthy ageing process, older people need to live their day-to-day lives in safety and security. This concept comprises both their subjective perception and the material aspects favouring their sense of protection (housing, food, economic resources, access to health and social services, personal protection, ...).

The mechanisms to create favourable settings for the elderly must take into account all areas of life. To this end, it is necessary to provide ease of access to their environment and facilitate their ability to remain in the areas where they choose to live.

The development of new technologies, which have to provide a positive support for the elderly, are nonetheless generating a new social divide, as they are at the moment inaccessible for the vast majority of elderly people in developing countries.

Measures intended to improve the conditions of everyday life represent a great incentive for industry, the market in general and the generation of employment. But they also constitute a challenge for governments, local and national administrations and their representatives as well as for all institutions.
LEGAL PROTECTION

In most countries there is no respect for the right of the elderly to their independence, in terms of the respect of their legal capacity and access to information and advice on legal affairs.

There is insufficient recognition of the right to protection in old age when there are physical or mental causes of dependence leading to the possibility of loss of legal capacity.

There is often no recognition of or no real respect for the right to protection in situations of abuse, violence and ill-treatment in local, national and international spheres, as well as for the protection of persons residing in institutions. There has been insufficient progress in the development of Human Rights with regard to persons suffering from dementia.

ETHNIC MINORITIES AND MIGRATORY MOVEMENTS

Despite the provisions of the United Nations Declarations of Rights, in many countries ethnic minorities suffer especially the breach of their fundamental rights. This situation is particularly serious among the oldest populations profoundly rooted in their cultural traditions and with greater difficulties to integrate into mainstream cultures.

Similar situations affect individuals who are emigrating every day in larger numbers to other countries due to economic reasons or in order to seek asylum or refuge for ideological or religious reasons. The sense of uprootedness suffered by such individuals is all the more acute in those of advanced age.

ENVIRONMENT

The environment, the last of the common goods affecting all of humankind, is also the basic element for our lives and for the progress of our species. A greet many of the most sustainable practices and relationships with nature which must be recovered and maintained are to be found in our forebears.

New illnesses and the spread of known diseases originate or are enhanced by the deterioration of the environment.

The urban setting, the health of the environment and consumption are matters directly affecting the lives of the elderly.
PROPOSALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION BY GOVERNMENTS AND THE CIVIL SOCIETY.

The World NGO Forum calls for the drafting of a Convention sponsored by the United Nations for the elimination of all types of discrimination towards older people, as an instrument of the highest rank to provide true protection for the human rights of this population group.

The NGO Forum presents the following proposals that may contribute in the short and medium term to the transformation of that reality:

- The governments have the responsibility for developing social protection systems to ensure the universal receipt of basic income by all older people, in both formal and informal sectors, in both rural and urban settings. Guarantees must be provided that pension resources are not used for other economically different purposes.

- The principle of active ageing must preside health policies in all spheres of life: local, national and international.

- Health protection must be seen as a fundamental right of the elderly and acknowledged as such in the constitutions and legislations of all countries, avoiding any age-related discrimination.

- Governments must accept, as one of their basic responsibilities, that they guarantee the elderly access to public health services permitting the appropriate prevention, diagnosis, rehabilitation and treatment. It is necessary to provide health professionals with appropriate training in geriatrics and gerontology.

- The attention paid to health care must be viewed from an integral perspective taking into account the social problems afflicting the elderly and impacting on their health problems.

- Health education must give specific consideration to the elderly, and to the relatives who care for them and the professionals in charge of their health care.
• The focus on mental health, Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia and on problems of a psychological nature must be assumed as part of an integral approach, with appropriate respect for the individual's dignity.

• It is necessary to develop prevention programmes, from vaccination to appropriate nutrition and dental health, as well as the empowerment of positive measures such as physical activity, avoidance of smoking and alcoholism, etc. and the early detection of highly-prevalent geriatric pathologies and syndromes.

• The health authorities must ensure the participation of the elderly in the development of health programmes.

• Co-ordination between health services and social services must be guaranteed, as part of the continuum of care for the elderly.

• Governments must foster the development of social service and health networks so as to allow individuals to grow old with dignity at home, with effective support for relatives providing care and facilitation of the incorporation of women into the world of employment.

• It is particularly urgent to design and implement programmes and the provision of care for persons with dependence, who are going to represent in the coming decades a large proportion of the elderly, through public social protection systems. Furthermore, it is essential for prevention and care programmes to be developed for the elderly suffering from AIDS disease and for the economic shortcomings and lack of information available to carers of sick relatives and young orphans to be confronted.

• The international community must tackle the remission of foreign debt, with the requirement that the economic resources released thereby should be earmarked primarily for social welfare policies, which must include special attention for those related with the elderly.

• The international financial institutions must stop conditioning their approval of economic support measures for developing and under-developed countries to the adoption of cutbacks in social policies.
• Developed countries and in particular those receiving emigrant populations must undertake to conduct co-operation programmes, which should reach 0.7% of GDP in a reasonable time.

• Co-operation and poverty-reduction programmes must ensure the inclusion of a percentage of the Funding for projects aimed at the elderly.

• The NGOs from the north and the international NGOs must be aware of and provide greater economic support to the micro-projects of the NGOs from the south, as well as provide opportunities for the transfer and sharing of endeavours from one country to another in defence of the elderly.

• The United Nations should approve the creation of a Social Emergency Fund intended to alleviate the effects on the elderly population in developing or under-developed states of armed conflicts, severe and prolonged economic crises, natural catastrophes, famines, etc.

• Governments and the civil society must acknowledge the ability of older people to make a contribution to social development. Such acknowledgement must be based on respect for the diversity of cultures, ethnic roots and life experiences of older men and women.

• Governments and the civil society must propitiate the proper exploitation of the social resource represented by the elderly for the development of their countries through inter-generational solidarity tasks and tasks with other older people, always with respect for their dignity.

• The NGOs must combine their efforts to support the elderly and to promote their qualification, mobility and an increase in their influence on social policies.

• Governments must ensure the active participation of older persons in the local and national debates for the taking of decisions on social and development policies, acknowledging the inter-generational work effected by the elderly.

• The adaptation of societies to ageing requires that the associations of older people and NGOs must participate in the planning,
management and assessment of the services aimed at the elderly or those services with which they are involved, institutionalizing stable instruments for participation and control. Governments and local authorities must promote this approach in the relations between the different sectors, with the aim of achieving that the services are culturally appropriate and satisfy the needs of the elderly.

- The importance of training as a life-long continuum becomes, in the elderly, an important tool for achieving good quality of life. The public and private promoters of training activities, from non-formal to university education, have to incorporate the inter-generational perspective into their training initiatives.

- The associations of older people have to adapt to a changing environment and so must define plural and supportive action plans, with proposals expressing their commitment with different generations and the learning shared between elderly people from around the world; they also have to inter-relate with other social movements and organizations with a view to reinforcing a transversal approach to ageing.

- Older people claim their presence as actors in the construction of peace in the world. It is necessary for a pro-peace culture to be included on the agendas of the associations of the elderly. In this sense, it is proposed to create a Council of Older Persons promoting Peace, intended to foster communication and co-operation between people from different countries to collaborate in initiatives in favour of peace.

- Governments, NGOs and associations of elderly individuals must give priority to the qualification of older men and women so that their participation is satisfactory and effective.

- Research centres must promote studies incorporating the inter-generational perspective and developing catalogues of this type of activity, so as to enable sustained training programmes in this direction.

- The elderly have a role as active agents in a new form of globalization: the globalization of solidarity.

- The adaptation of the immediate environment, as with any other preventive measure, must begin early, before any immediate need arises.
• New technologies must be accessible for individuals of all ages and abilities, with the possibility that older people may continue to live independently and take their own decisions, so improving access to services and contributing to greater quality of life.

• The preparation of statistics and research into the poverty of the elderly must be a priority for governments, NGOs and world-wide institutions (UNO, IMF, World Bank, etc.). It is especially urgent to analyze the impact of migratory movements, AIDS, armed conflicts and humanitarian crises and their consequences on the exclusion of the elderly.

• Governments and international organizations must ensure that the public can access statistics, reports, experience with good practices in connection with the elderly, so as to facilitate, among others, the establishment of networks for the sharing of actions programmes and inter-generational projects.

• The mass media must report on diversity and plurality of the reality of the elderly, their capacities and needs, so as to eliminate stereotypes between generations and to reduce the barriers to participation.

• The Ageing Forum calls for the inclusion of older persons among the main groups of the Agenda 21, (Rio de Janeiro Environment Summit, which encourages social participation).

• Cities must be planned and managed for and by the elderly to ensure accessibility and environmental quality.

• An appropriate distribution of the necessary services and installations for the elderly so that they are close to their place of residence.

• Improvement in the design of housing and environmental setting in order to promote independence of older people with security.

• To promote universal design standards to ensure the safety of the elderly in all types of building, as well as in all forms of public and private transport, so that it is not exceptional for these to be used by people with physical impairments or disabilities.

• To inform and train older people as consumers so that they can consume in a responsible and ethical manner to ensure safety of their food intake, a healthy ecosystem and fair employment
relations which will benefit all the societies and cultures of the
globe. This is possible with clear and honest labelling.

- To promote the recycling of tools and appliances for the elderly and
  for people with disabilities, avoiding deterioration of the
  environment and making their acquisition more affordable.

- With regard to the consumption of medicines, the following
  proposals are put forward:
    - To respect, study and support the traditional health
      treatments of each culture and community.
    - To ensure that the medicines prescribed for the elderly are in
      optimal conditions, the doses are appropriate and side
      effects are clearly explained.
    - To avoid the inappropriate consumption of medicines. To
      inform on the effect of these as waste products harming the
      environment.
    - The pharmaceutical industry must respect the planet’s
      ecosystems.

- To contemplate the affective and family relationships between
  generations as a guarantee for social health and prevention within
  the framework concept of human ecology.

- To respect the environment and the planet as a concept and as an
  essential value in the religions and beliefs of many cultures on the
  various continents.

- To protect as a priority all sources of water, the essential element
  for any form of life, as it is threatened all over the world by industry,
  uncontrolled urbanization, intensive agriculture and, above all, in
  situations of war and poverty.

- To review the concept of birth rate as opposed to the ageing of the
  developed societies, by determining the optimum population volume
  and active immigration policies.

- To recognize women as environmental educators with respect to
  their families, providing incentives to facilitate environmental
  protection in their surroundings.

- The NGO Forum on Ageing demands that the World Health
  Organization should include the concept of environmental health in
  its definition of health in the 21st century: physical, mental, social
  and environmental health.
• It is necessary to plan comprehensive policies for the elderly. Current policies are fragmented and often lack an age-related perspective.

• In State Budgets, government must contemplate appropriate levels of expense vis-à-vis the number of elderly people in proportion to the total population.

• Each country must create a National Plan including economic, social, cultural and health aspects to support anti-poverty programmes and so ensure easy universal access in “age-friendly communities”.

• Recognition should be given to the premature ageing of persons with disabilities and there should be greater flexibility in the awarding of invalidity pensions due to aggravation of the disability.

• In addition to being a universal right, retirement should be promoted as a situation that can be reached voluntarily in a flexible and gradual manner.

• It is proposed to draw up a Code of Good Practices and an Intergenerational Mutual Support Pact.

• The creation of the positions of Ombudsman for the Elderly should be fostered as should Councillors for the Elderly at all municipalities or local authorities.

• Equal wages for men and women must be guaranteed with respect for the maxim of “same work, same wage”, without discrimination by reason of age.

• Governments have to provide resources and assistance for the promotion and training of volunteers, with adequate technical and financial resources to sustain their activities.

• It is necessary to introduce indicators for measurement of both the quality perceived and the quality rendered. It is also necessary to demand quality in the technical and human aspects of the provision of services.
• It is necessary to appreciate the value of the care services sector for the elderly and to achieve an improved assessment and remuneration of care professionals.

• The role of Older People in looking after their grandchildren must be recognized.

• The protection of older people declared legally incompetent must be guaranteed by means of an enhancement of public, private and non-profit institutions for their representation.

• The personal fulfilment of older people in all of their potential includes the exercise of their sexuality without exclusions of the form which they may choose or decide.

• It is proposed to create a symbolic prize, comparable to the Nobel Peace Prize, to be awarded annually among those older individuals who have rendered a service to the community.

• The NGOs must be aware of and detect the basic needs of the elderly in order to develop social policies. Similarly, they must take part in research into ageing issues, consult citizens and develop action plans and recommendations favouring social change. NGOs must submit to on-going assessment of their actions, programmes and services.

• A boost must be given to the training of formal and informal carers.

The Forum proposes the creation of a United Nations Agency specializing in the elderly, with responsibility, among other things, for monitoring and supervising the Action Plan, as well as for promoting the use of the potential of the elderly.

Finally, we wish to reiterate that processes of globalization without human rights and without equality are inconceivable and unacceptable and this is particularly decisive when it comes to the rights of the elderly.

Most particularly, we must conclude that NGOs are legitimate channels for civil society to be able to demand the achievement of a special dimension in the construction of a new society through their actions, which attempt
to remedy the culture of indifference, exasperated individualism, competitiveness and utilitarianism which currently threaten all realms of human fellowship, and, in order to avoid all rupture between generations, NGOs are destined to promote a new mindset, new customs, news ways of being, a new culture based on solidarity.

For all these reasons, the NGOs assembled in Madrid at the II World Forum on Ageing proclaim the need to build not only a society for all ages, but a society that pursues social justice and welfare without forgetting to place individuals and their dignity at the centre of its goals.

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CERTIFICATION
Edward EWING, as Official Translator of Spanish and English, hereby certifies that the foregoing text is a true and complete translation in English of its original in Spanish.
In Collado Villalba, on May 10th, 2002.

CERTIFICACIÓN
Don Edward EWING, Intérprete Jurado de inglés certifica que la que antecede es traducción fiel y completa al inglés de un documento redactado en lengua española.
En Collado Villalba, a diez de mayo de 2002.