



Statement

by

H.E. Ms. Paulette Bethel

Chef de Cabinet of the 68th Session of the United Nations

General Assembly

on behalf of

the President of the 68th Session of the United Nations

General Assembly

New York

9 October 2013

International Day of Older Persons

The Future We Want - What Older Persons are Saying

Longevity and Development: Opportunities and Challenges

Please check against delivery

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Excellencies,

I am honoured to join you today in celebration of the International Day of Older Persons and speak on behalf of H.E. Dr. John Ashe, President of this 68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. I would like to thank the NGO Committee on Ageing for bringing us together to commemorate this occasion and for the excellent work you do to bring attention to the issue of ageing.

Indeed, ageing is an matter that concerns all of us, young and old. As we go through life, we are supported by our elders, take care of older family members and of course, we all get old ourselves, and so the well-being of older persons is a matter we must all take to heart.

Yet, beyond personal considerations, the reality of demographics is calling the international community to pay close attention to this issue. As we set the stage for a new development agenda, we cannot ignore the growing ranks of older people. The world population is rapidly ageing. When the General Assembly first considered the issue of ageing in 1969, over 300 millions people were 60 or older. Today, there are over 810 million in that category, and it is expected that by 2050, there will be over 2 billion.

These global changes are catalyzing a change in the way we view older populations, who contribute so much to our societies. Older persons carry with them a wealth of experience, know how and wisdom. Among other things, they contribute to their communities through volunteer work; help with familial care and increasingly participate in the paid labour force.

Yet, older persons also face a number of specific challenges and are more at risk of falling into poverty. They frequently suffer discrimination in the job market as well. Older women are particularly vulnerable, and are often victimized by discriminatory

property and inheritance laws. Societies must work to strengthen the economic position of older persons and ensure their income security.

Another challenge of older populations relates to issues of health and well being. The vulnerabilities of aging mean that older persons require access to appropriate and adequate health care. In 2050, 8 out of 10 older persons will live in the developing world, where, in many cases, adequate access to healthcare and social safety nets is lacking or nascent, at best. In order to address the specific health needs of elders, health care systems will need to adapt and will need to place greater emphasis on non-communicable diseases.

Finally, as we recognise the specific vulnerabilities of older people, we must also strive to promote their rights. More than a decade ago, the General Assembly adopted the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. It was an important milestone in our efforts to build “a society for all ages”. It marked a turning point in how governments linked issues of aging to other areas of human rights and economic and social rights, with a focus on three priority areas: (1) older persons and development; (2) advancing health and well-being into old age and; (3) ensuring enabling and supportive environments. This comprehensive action plan was followed by the establishment of an open ended working group on Ageing in 2010, intended to strengthen the human rights of elder persons, which is now considering existing international frameworks and looking to identify possible gaps and how best to address them.

As we embark on preparations for the post 2015 development agenda, we must continue to consider the rights and well-being of elder persons in our development frameworks. Older persons must be fully engaged as participants and architects of the Post-2015 Agenda, so that they may share in its benefits which must be inclusive of people of all ages, genders and abilities.

Thank you.