

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF OLDER PERSONS

1 October 2003

Over the next few decades, older persons will form an increasingly large and important presence in communities and societies everywhere. And yet, until recently, little attention had been paid to how we can best use the skills of older persons in development.

Then, last year, the Second World Assembly on Ageing adopted the Madrid International Plan of Action, which called for a fundamental shift in how we think about ageing and older persons. The Madrid Plan moved policy issues on ageing out of the narrow confines of the social welfare agenda, and into the mainstream of development policy debate. It acknowledged that older persons represent a powerful but untapped resource for society. It put forward recommendations on how we can adjust to an ageing world and build a society for all ages.

In my follow-up report to the current General Assembly, I proposed a practical framework for both national and international action to implement the Madrid Plan with two main focuses: national capacity-building, and mainstreaming of ageing into the developmental agenda.

During this first year of the implementation process, we have seen progress on a number of fronts. At the intergovernmental level, the modalities for review and appraisal of the implementation of the Plan have been agreed. During 2002, Member States in Europe and Asia developed strategies for implementation, while Latin America and the Caribbean should have a strategy in place by the end of this year. We expect that a process of implementation in the African region will follow.

Every one of us can help build bridges between generations by embracing the skills of older persons, whether in community or family affairs, agriculture or urban entrepreneurship, education, technology or the arts, poverty reduction or peacebuilding. The challenge before us is to bring the invaluable attributes of older people out of obscurity and into step with other instruments of development -- including the work to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, our blueprint for building a better world in the 21st century. On this International Day of Older Persons, let us vow to make the most of the powerful resource that older persons represent in the work for development.