

International Human Solidarity Day 2010
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REMARKS ON BEHALF OF THE UNITED NATIONS NGO COMMITTEE ON AGEING
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Ambassador Jomaa, Mr. Lee, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I welcome and appreciate this opportunity to participate on this panel to commemorate Human Solidarity with the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Permanent Mission of Tunisia to the United Nations.

I think it is a wonderful opportunity to take a moment and think about human solidarity. It is not only a good thing to celebrate our unity and diversity but it is also very important as we look at achieving further social development.

I was asked to highlight the dimensions and importance of intergenerational solidarity from the perspective of an advocate for older persons and discuss INITIATIVES FOR POVERTY ERADICATION.

It is very fitting to have the UN NGO Committee on Ageing as part of this panel as the mission of our committee is to further the UN goal of building a society for all ages. Just two months ago the United Nations marked the 20th Anniversary of the International Day of Older Persons and we celebrate the fact that people around the world are living longer and healthier lives. This is the first time in history there will be more older persons in the world than children in just a couple decades.

This is certainly a reason to celebrate human solidarity.....younger people and older people living and sharing together.

Older people remain invisible in efforts to achieve the MDGs

Today we are here to discuss intergenerational solidarity to combat poverty. Poverty affects whole households and is transmitted across generations. Old age can be a period of extreme vulnerability to poverty and ill health and social exclusion. It has been estimated that currently less than 20% of older people in the world are covered by pensions which suggests that as many as 607 million people aged 60 and above lack income security. There is much research that shows that when an older person receives a pension, the pension benefits the whole household and helps the children and younger generations living within the household.

As we celebrate human solidarity, it is important that we recognize that we are far from fulfilling our goal of building a society for all ages. This past September, President Obama and all world leaders gathered in New York for the United Nations General Assembly. Heads of State presented their agendas, priorities and concerns on the world stage and

reaffirmed a renewed support for the Millennium Development Goals, an ambitious agenda world leaders set 10 years ago to tackle global poverty.

There is no doubt that the MDGs have been influential in galvanizing international support and providing momentum to tackle poverty, hunger, disease, climate change and discrimination against women. However, as a Committee of organizations representing older persons around the world, we are concerned about the continued exclusion of older women and men in international agreement and the Millennium Development Goals. There is significant lack of recognition of the critical contribution they make towards the achievement of the MDGs.

Despite this, older people are not explicitly mentioned in any of the MDG targets or indicators to measure their progress. As a result most development policies and programs focus their efforts on children, young people and the working age poor, lacking any understanding of the critical social, economic and contributions of older people.

I raise this point about the MDGs not to suggest attention should be drawn away from children and youth towards older persons. On the contrary we should consider all generations in tackling poverty.

As a future older person, I firmly believe that ensuring that younger generations can age with dignity and respect is important in promoting intergenerational solidarity and a society for all ages.

As we continue to face a global economic crisis, many times we hear the media pitting one generation against another suggesting a competition of resources. The older vs. the younger generation. This is wrong.

Good public policies – Social Security, public education, affordable health care – do not impact one generation at the expense of the others. They are policies that help us all. If parents die or become disabled, our nation's young children and youth are going to need Social Security to prosper. If our children are not properly educated for 21st Century challenges, will they be able to fuel tomorrow's economy? Without adequate health care will we be able to care for our children, parents, and grandparents? We need to create and implement policies that help generations help each other, thereby strengthening economies.

The U.S. Example

There has been a concerted campaign to convince young people that Social Security will not be there for them when they retire given that people are living longer and there will be more people to support in the system. Concrete data shows this not to be true but polls show that fewer than half of younger Americans say that they never expect to receive Social Security. This attitude is understandable though completely wrong). Unfortunately politicians have been saying for years that Social Security is broken when it is not.

Cynicism is running high among younger workers and this should not be the case when social security and pension systems are a perfect example of intergenerational solidarity and transfers. Given the continued stability of the U.S. Social Security system, the best course for now is to leave the system alone. Future workers are going to be much more productive than today's workers though improvements in technology -- knowledge and machines -- that will continue to accumulate over the coming decades.

Globally intergenerational solidarity is increasingly seen in:

- Caregiving, grandmothers etc.
- The modern workplace, older workers with younger managers. A change in the workforce model. Transfer of knowledge, acquiring new skills.
- Recent array of articles in the NYTimes illustrate how the youth are getting involved with the elderly. Especially assisting with Alzheimers/dementia
- Technology, bringing generations together.

The NGO Committee on Ageing calls for a more inclusive, rights-based approach to ensure all those living in chronic poverty, including younger generations, be reached.

On November 19, the UN General Assembly adopted a landmark resolution establishing a working group to address the rights of older people. This is the first meaningful step toward creating a Human Rights Instrument on the rights of older people. The Committee on Ageing believes a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons is necessary to ensure that older people can realize their rights and to ensure the well being of future older persons. With a new UN Convention, governments would have an explicit legal framework with guidance and support that would enable them to ensure that older people's rights are realized in our increasingly aging societies.

“A country that does not take care of its young people and old people is a country without a soul.” -- Generations United